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platinum

live, look & feel fabulous

Mariella Frostrup

‘At 60, there are a million things I want to do’

How to create your dream outdoor kitchen

DOUBLE YOUR ENERGY IN 30 DAYS!

Age is nothing but a number!

- Why an active sex life helps you feel good!
- **Discover how to keep your mind in great shape**
- Let go of the pressure to be ‘younger’

FUN IN THE SUN WITH STUNNING SHADES

Jane Moore

Could it be time for a new life in the country?

Wellbeing

DOTTIE MONAGHAN ON SPF AND MAKE-UP

DR DAWN HARPER’S TOP SELF-CARE TIPS

SIMPLE TWEAKS TO BEAT BACK PAIN

BEAUTY

How to keep your hands looking great!

JULY 2023 / £5.50
07
KELSEYmedia

CELEBRATING THE BRITISH COAST• LIVING WITH GROWN-UP KIDS •PERFECT PAELLA

VISIT…

LANZAROTE
Caliente.com

WHAT ARE YOU CAPABLE OF?

Take the next step to better wellbeing

As we move through the seasons of life, it’s essential to maintain an active lifestyle to keep our bodies strong and mobile. To understand what keeps our joints healthy we recently caught up with Kelsey who is part of the ‘intrepid 8’, a group of eight women over 50 taking part in a charity walk from Petra to Jordan. The five-day hike involves trekking for 9 hours a day to raise money for a Children’s Hospital close to their hearts.
When asked about her active lifestyle, Kelsey says:

“Healthy joints are essential, there’s no way I’d be able to be as active as I am if I didn’t take very good care of them. The one piece of advice I give everyone is to exercise regularly, eat well and remember that wellbeing doesn’t just cover your physical health but also your mental health. **Self care is never selfish.**”

Find tips and tricks from more inspirational women including wild swimmer Naomi and hill-runner Sarah here:
www.cytoplan.co.uk/inspirational-women

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CYTOPLAN
NATURE MEETS SCIENCE

Editor's welcome

There is nothing more spectacular than a woman truly at ease with herself, and this month we're celebrating a woman who's well and truly that. Mariella Frostrup has been a regular fixture on our TV screens for the best part of the past three decades, initially known for her smart blonde bob and husky voice, before graduating into a renowned literary expert and women's campaigner. Yes, in her interview (p10) she does touch on the menopause, but she also shares so much more than that: her difficult upbringing, losing her father at just 15 to alcoholism; her heartbreak at seeing both her mother and grandmother succumb to Alzheimer's; and her own feelings now, age 60, of still wanting to do and see so much in the years ahead – and having no plans for retirement for a long time to come! It's an inspiring and invigorating read, and one I hope you'll enjoy as much as I did.

Besides Mariella, this month I'm delighted to welcome back some long-standing *Platinum* favourites to our pages. The brilliant Jane Moore is as cutting as ever with her wry take on moving to the country (p56). I certainly wouldn't want to be the one trying out my new leaf blower while Jane's trying to relax this summer...

Plus, we have some helpful tips on how to take care of our mental health whatever we're facing from Dr Dawn Harper (p28), Gail Rolfe shares how to be inspired by the natural world to wear sunset tones (p16), Dottie Monaghan explains the intricacies of how to wear a good SPF *and* your regular make-up without it sliding off your face before you've finished your cornflakes (p44), and Adele Parks shares her favourite reads right now in our book club (p122). Some more familiar faces and features may return next month, too – so watch this space!

Thanks to so many of you for getting in touch following my first issue last month. It's great to know that *Platinum* has such a devoted readership, and the way you shared what is important to you was really helpful. I know that change is never easy, but I'm going to continue working hard to make this a magazine that celebrates women like you, in the prime of life. I hope you have a great month!

Sally x

SALLY SAUNDERS **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

This month

Dr Dawn Harper's guide to good mental health **p28**

Dottie Monaghan's summer-skin round-up **p44**

Jane Moore celebrates the sound of silence **p56**

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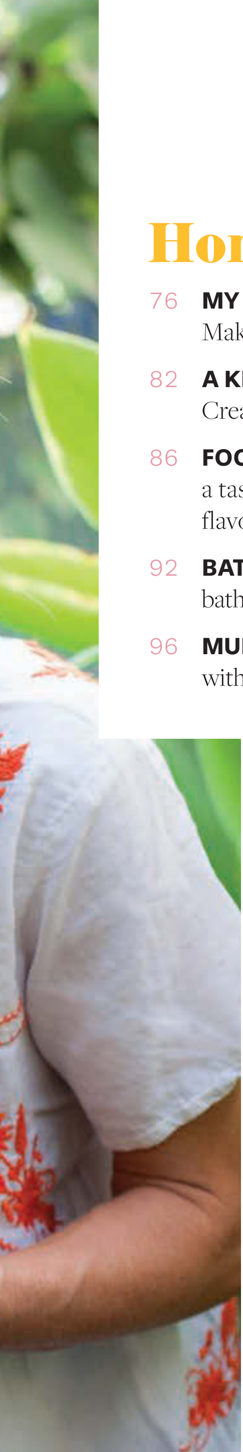

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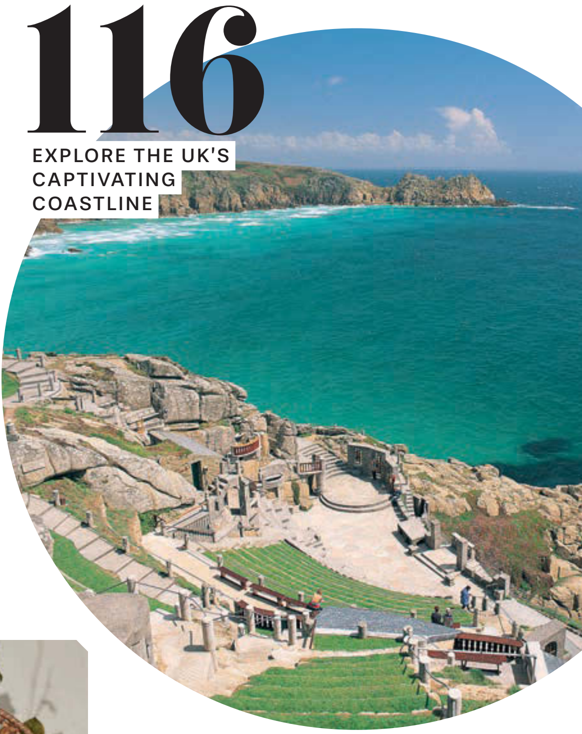

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Our experts

EACH MONTH, OUR TEAM OF EXPERTS SHARE THEIR WEALTH OF KNOWLEDGE, FROM FASHION AND BEAUTY, TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING

GAIL ROLFE ▶
STYLE
Fashion expert Gail shows you how to wear this season's sunset shades

◀ DR DAWN HARPER
HEALTH & WELLBEING
GP Dr Dawn shares how to look after your mental health the natural way

◀ DOTTIE MONAGHAN
BEAUTY
Stay perfectly made-up *and* safe in the sun – Dottie has the insider knowledge!

JANE MOORE ▶
LIFE & TIMES
Silence is golden, they say – but, as ever, Jane might have a different opinion!

◀ **OMAR ALLIBHOY**

HOME

Chef and author Omar shares his passion for paella and helps you recreate the Spanish classic

DR MEGAN ARROLL ▶

AWAY

Psychologist Dr Megan helps you to bring head and gut in harmony in time for your holiday

◀ **ADELE PARKS MBE**

BOOKS

Adele rounds up the latest and greatest reads. Don't pack your suitcase without one!

SARA COX

REGULARS ▶

Presenter and author Sara shares her life lessons

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Chevron Textured Stripe Jumper, £75, monsoon.co.uk

Bold Stripe Garden Throw, £75, joebrowns.co.uk

Green Striped Satin Midi Skirt, £65, oliverbonas.com

Summer stripes

GET IN LINE FOR YOUR BEST SUMMER YET, WITH THESE BOLD, STYLISH BUYS!

Soft Pink With Rainbow Lurex Maxi Sundress, £110, scampanddude.com

Multicoloured Stripes Glass Jug, £5, homesense.com

Stripe Shirt, £16; Linen Statement Button Trousers, £22. Both peacocks.co.uk

Red Stripe Midaxi Dress,
£25.99, newlook.com

Summer Haze
Stripe Pink Bedding
Set, £20 for a double,
habitat.co.uk

Newbury Quilted Picnic
Rug, £69, tweedmill.com

Stripe Flip Flop Multi,
£9, accessorize.com

Stripe Raffia Slouch Bag,
£32, accessorize.com

‘Purpose is so important, as we age’

JOURNALIST AND PRESENTER MARIELLA FROSTRUP, 60, OPENS UP ABOUT FINDING FULFILMENT, KEEPING IT REAL, AND SHAKING OFF THE STIGMA SURROUNDING MENOPAUSE

I regret smoking in my youth, because now I’m repulsed by it. Back then, I had a very complicated relationship both with food and cigarettes. If I was happy, I ate normally and would be reasonably slim, and if I wasn’t happy, I ate anything and everything I could lay my hands on, and would then be even more unhappy that I’d put on lots of weight. That awful, destructive cycle of self-loathing and self-harm was very prevalent until my mid-30s, when I got sick of living like that. If you’re lucky, the whole process of maturing is about gaining confidence in yourself and developing resilience, and both of those things started to kick in during the middle of my 30s, when I started making better choices.

I now live in the country and walk our dogs every single day, which keeps me active. And once every couple of weeks I go running with some girlfriends – but only for three kilometres; I’m really lazy!

I’m not very good with big birthdays. When it comes to changing decades, I get slightly overwhelmed and a little bit retrospective; I start looking backwards and find it hard to think about what I’m going to do moving forwards. My 40th birthday was amazing because I was in the Seychelles and, on the eve of my birthday, at midnight, I got engaged [to her human rights lawyer husband Jason McCue, whom she married in 2003]. I had my children (Molly, 18, and Danny, 17) shortly after that, so

WORDS: GEMMA CALVERT. IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES

my 40s dealt with a mass of activity. Fifty felt as if it came along way too early, so I refused to celebrate it, then I was rescued by two girlfriends who arranged a surprise dinner party. Turning 60 last November, I just wanted it to pass. I'm very conscious of the fact that, particularly as a woman in the public eye, I risk becoming defined by my age. I don't feel any different, so I find that frustrating. At 60, I'm full of energy; there are a million things I want to do, a million places I want to go, and a million things I want to achieve!

Purpose is incredibly important as we grow older. Although there are days when I think to myself, 'What happened to that retirement idea?,' I had my children late and so I need to see them through school and university. Also, if I don't have a project on the go, I don't know what to do with myself. Plus, a report last year revealed that if you're imbued with a sense of purpose, you'll have less chance of getting Alzheimer's disease, which was really interesting to me, particularly as both my mother and grandmother succumbed to it. I've seen two incredibly vibrant, feisty women become empty shells through Alzheimer's. It was heartbreaking to watch them decline.

There's barely a woman in the world who'll escape brain fog in perimenopause. As an ex-boyfriend used to say, very charmingly, 'The cheese is slipping off the cracker!' One of the reasons I got deeply embedded in the menopause issue was because there was so much ignorance around it, including the fact that brain fog is one of the major symptoms. Writing the book and delving deeper was a way of better understanding what was happening to me, which was reassuring. The scariest thing is that none of us associate the multitude of symptoms with menopause, because there's so little written about it and so little medical support given to it, so it all comes as a horrible surprise.

Perimenopause is when hormonal turbulence is happening, and that tends to start anywhere from seven

> "At 60, I'm full of energy; there are a million things I want to do, a million places I want to go, and a million things I want to achieve!"

to 10 years before menopause. By the time most women are getting help from a GP, they've spent seven years in the turmoil of a hormonal rollercoaster, without even knowing it, because they don't recognise the symptoms. I'm still so animated, amazed and shocked by it. Its another huge example of how women have been discriminated against over the years.

I lost my father to alcoholism when I was only 15. It was one of the childhood influences that made me grow up quite fast and take responsibility for myself. Relying on anyone else never seemed an option, and that's played out in my personal, working, and campaigning life. I just roll up my sleeves and get it done. We're terrible for knocking people off their pedestals, but I shirk negativity, which I connect to my resilience and determination but also, to some degree, fear. My father was definitely depressed. That's why he was an alcoholic and why he managed to drink himself to death at 44. That always informs how scared I am about tipping over into the dark side.

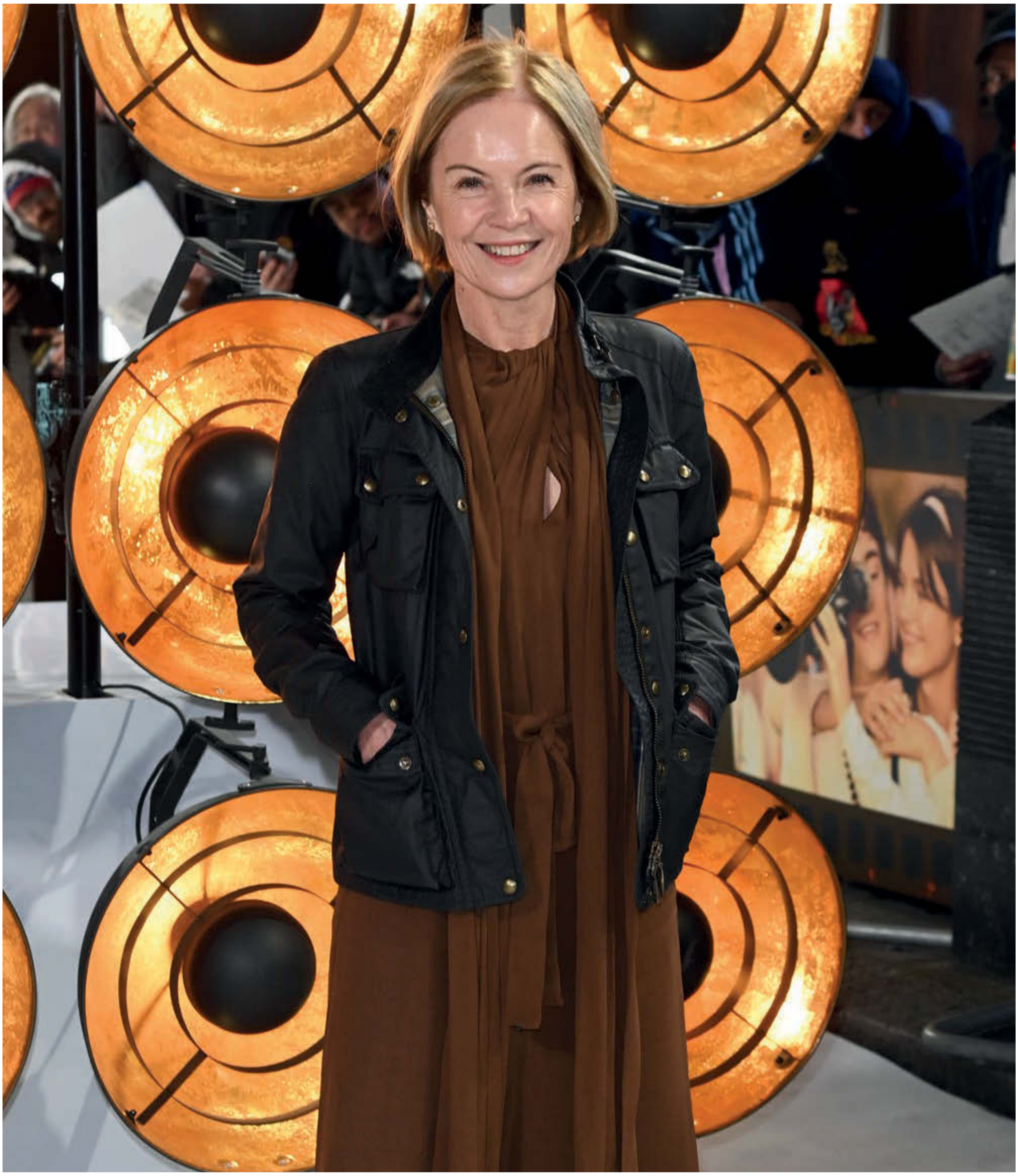
I believe in dusting yourself off, getting up and fighting another day. This is why I don't have much patience with people who seem to be eternally life's victims. I understand what a terrible disease depression is, but we shouldn't confuse that with what we also have at the moment: an insidious culture of victimhood, which is so bad for all of us. My life, even on its worst possible day, is immeasurably better than a mum down the road having to use a food bank for the first time with her two young children. And her life is immeasurably better than some girl in Afghanistan, full of hopes and dreams, who can't go to school any more.

I always used to say of cosmetic surgery, 'Who knows how I'll feel at 60,' but for me, trying to turn back the clock would make me very unhappy. Most people I see that go down that road, frankly, just look like old people who've had surgery. Although I've been having Botox since I was 35 to remove two furrows in my brow, which made me self-conscious (I looked angry, and I'm not an angry person!), I don't like the look of fake plumping. I'd far rather be the best version of who I am now. Happily, technology, products and our understanding of what makes us healthy have really moved on. Recently, I went for an eye-wateringly expensive facial at Skin Design London, and six weeks on, I look radically better in terms of skin tone. I'm lucky to live in an age where there are all kinds of treatments that don't require surgery.

I could live without make-up but not without a good face cream. Even when we were poverty stricken, my mum would always have a pot of Orlane. I've been through a few face creams, including Clarins, Dr Barbara Sturm, and now Stripes, Naomi Watts' skincare brand, designed for mature women. I'm also loving the vitamin C and retinol serums from Skin Design London. I'm not interested in products from companies that advertise everything with near-teenagers, though, using messaging about anti-ageing and youthfulness.

Its very easy for physical intimacy with your partner to become less of a priority as you age. For a lot of people, sex slips by the wayside. But, for me, it's really important to maintain that side of a relationship – it's what stops you just being best friends. In midlife, you go through a period when you're not driven by the same impulses, and you're not having sex because of overwhelming passion, but for a different, more profound reason: the intimacy. Diarising sex works for me because if I know that's what I'm doing on a particular day, it can be something I look forward to!

Cracking The Menopause
While Keeping Yourself Together
by Mariella Frostrup and
Alice Smellie (Bluebird, £9.99)
is out now. Find Mariella at
instagram.com/mariella_frostrup



> "I'm not interested in products from companies that advertise everything with near-teenagers, using messaging about anti-ageing"

Fashion INSIDER

with Gail Rolfe

PLATINUM'S FAVOURITE FASHION EXPERT GAIL ROLFE CELEBRATES THAT UBIQUITOUS SUMMER SIGN-OFF – A GLORIOUS GOLDEN SUNSET – AND SHOWS YOU HOW TO WEAR IT WELL

Nature has always been a source of inspiration for the fashion world. From lush flora and fauna, to spectacular landscapes and tropical forests, designers have distilled their surroundings to create magical outfits for us to wear. This season, they've turned their focus to the glory and majesty of the sunset. Of course, the love affair with painterly sunsets is nothing new; many decades ago Yves Saint Laurent successfully fused pink and scarlet in one unforgettable outfit, and fashion history was made. Maybe it is a timely reintroduction of a trend that is suffused with warmth, romance, holidays and relaxation, providing that much-needed hit of sartorial dopamine. Surrounded by a never-ending stream of bad news, joyous colour is what may help lift our spirits.

So, how to clad yourself in sunset colours? My advice is to stick to varying tones of one colour; or experiment and mix two or more together that flatteringly work in harmony. Particularly chic is tangerine orange paired with salmon pink, and the surprising combination of yellow with bubble-gum pink. Nature is proof positive that these are gloriously luxurious and successful colour combinations. If head to toe sunset is too much, simply add a fabulous bag or pair of shoes. As you sit outside dressed in the glow of a sunset, sip a matching Campari with blood orange. What could be better than that?

Blazer, £89.99; trousers, £32.99. Both zara.com

Suits you!

After seeing television presenter Nicki Chapman wearing a striking scarlet tailored trouser suit at this year's Chelsea Flower Show, it occurred to me that a simple suit like this is a sleek stylish alternative to the floral midi or maxi dress. It is so simple and easy. There are no mix-and-match conundrums; all you have to do is add a classic T-shirt, blouse or shirt, and your chosen style of shoes – be it strappy heels, espadrilles, or flat pumps. (Style note: do not believe the mutterings about the death of white trainers; I promise you this item has been awarded classic status, and will be around forever!)

My advice is to keep the outfit as simple as possible. I adore orange, but there are so many other fabulous hues to choose from: cobalt blue, red, lemon, and emerald green, as well as timeless navy and white.

Leather bag, £85, stories.com

Espadrilles, £85, boden.co.uk

Sunglasses, £115, whistles.com

IMAGES: BRANDS, GETTY IMAGES, NICK GREGAN

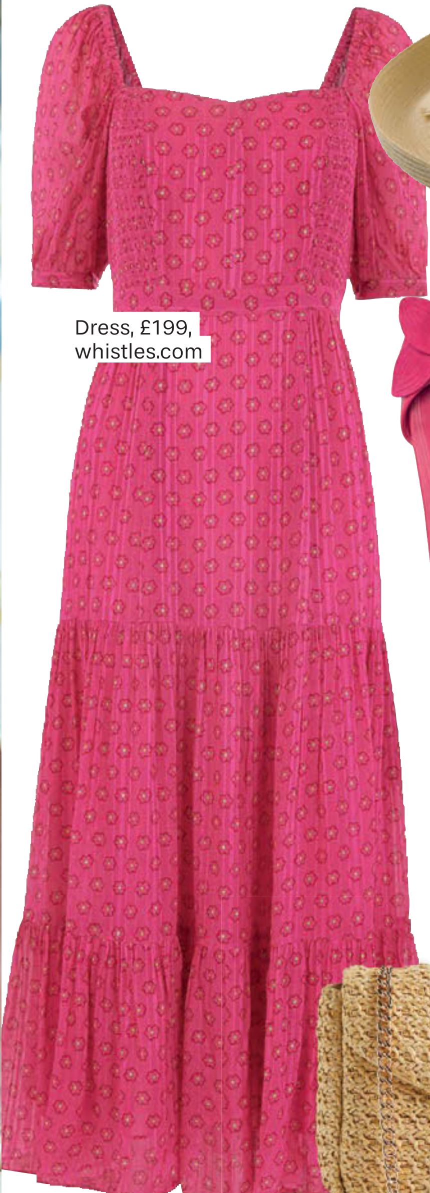
Queen Letizia of Spain pairs two shades of coral pink

Dress to impress

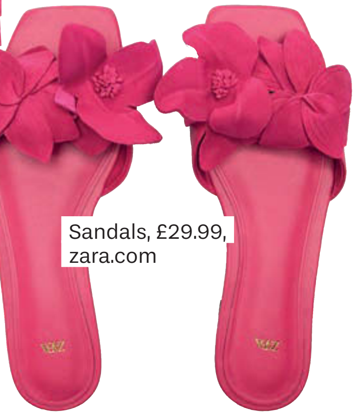
The versatility of midi and maxi dresses over the past eight years for women of all ages, sizes and heights has made them one of the most enduring and much-loved items in our wardrobes. Even if the influence of ditsy washed-out florals with their *Little House on the Prairie* vibe is fading, other more dramatic blooms are filling the gap. Colours are brighter, bolder and more vibrant this summer. This Whistles dress (below), in a glorious fuchsia pink, is a perfect example, with a flattering square neck, elbow-length sleeves, and a swishy skirt.

For dressier occasions, it is so easy to buy an inexpensive straw hat and add a toning ribbon or faux flowers, for a luxe finishing touch. Team with kitten or block heels. For a casual outing, opt for flat sandals. I adore these feminine suede floral flats (below), but there is no doubt that chunky versions seem to be the shoe of choice this summer. The choice is yours!

Hat, £19.95, Sur la Tête at hatsandcaps.co.uk



Dress, £199, whistles.com



Sandals, £29.99, zara.com

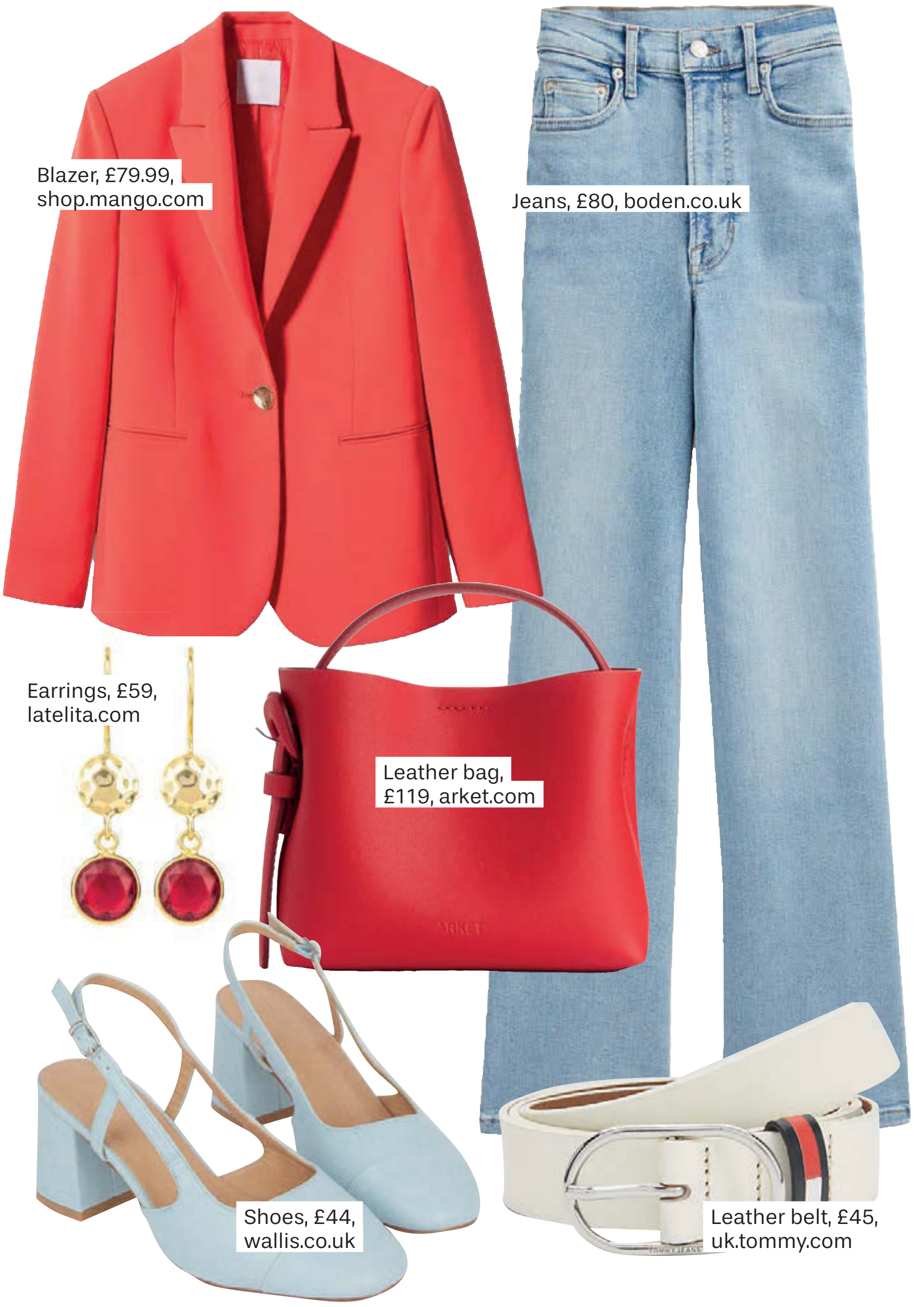
Earrings, £59, latelita.com

Straw bag, £17.99, hm.com

Sky high

There's something about the pairing of a warm red tone with the pale sky-blue hue in this Mint Velvet blouse that works so well. It's the sartorial combination of the dying sky and the emergence of the rich sunset. The blouse is the hero, so ensure everything else stays low-key. Wear it as shown here, with faded blue straight-leg jeans, or add a slinky satin bias-cut midi skirt in a similar shade of blue, for an evening mood (Hush has one in the perfect colour). Ivory jeans are also a great option. Keep your shoes to similar tones to maintain the sky-at-night mood.

Blouse, £79, mintvelvet.co.uk



Blazer, £79.99, shop.mango.com

Jeans, £80, boden.co.uk

Earrings, £59, latelita.com

Leather bag, £119, arket.com

Shoes, £44, wallis.co.uk

Leather belt, £45, uk.tommy.com

Style tips

Ever since Dior, Chanel and Chloé introduced voluminous canvas bags into their collections a few years ago, these functional and fashionable, bold and bright bags have become indispensable. They are your inexpensive style statement.

I love this beautifully crafted tote that is trimmed with leather. Perfect for all casual occasions.

Leather-trimmed canvas tote, £75, stories.com

If you wish to add a splash of colour to any outfit, this bag is a winner. It also comes in yellow.

Canvas tote bag, £55, arket.com

This bold striped canvas bag is effortless style on a budget. It comes in several colours.

Canvas shopper, £14.99, hm.com

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4.3 Average Review**
67% 5 star reviews
14% 4 star reviews

★★★★★

"I cannot believe there is a product out there that actually works! This pen is amazing."

★★★★★

"At the first tingle of the cold sore I zap it ..honestly, it stops the virus in its tracks!!! Highly recommend!"

*From 3 years, self-administration from 12 years. **Based on 1,571 reviews 31/1/23

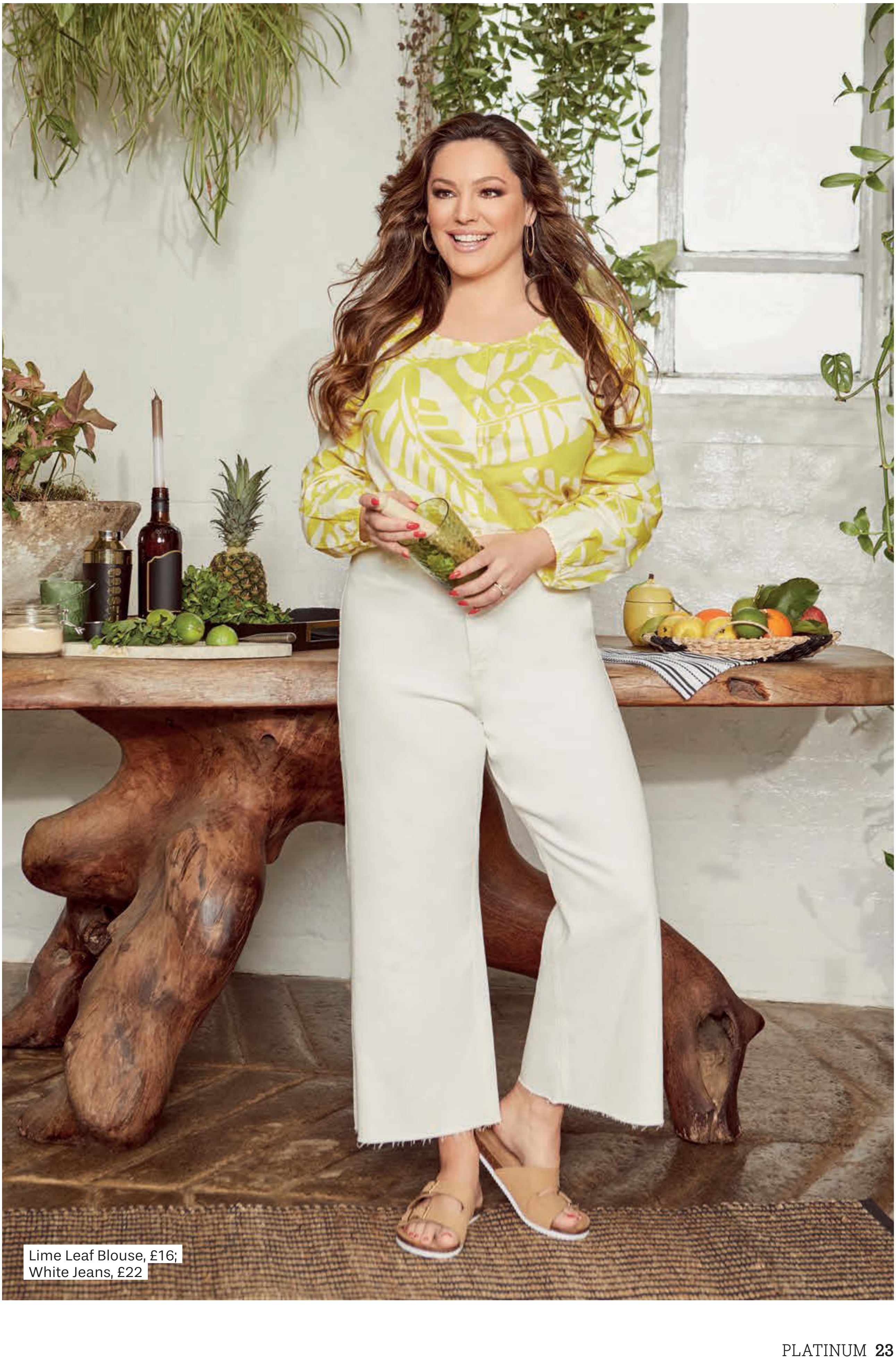
Kelly's capsule wardrobe

FEATURING FRESH FLORALS AND CRISP, CLASSIC WHITE, MODEL KELLY BROOK HAS YOUR SUMMER STYLE SORTED WITH HER EFFORTLESS AND AFFORDABLE NEW EDIT FOR F&F AT TESCO

Broderie Anglaise Mini Dress, £25

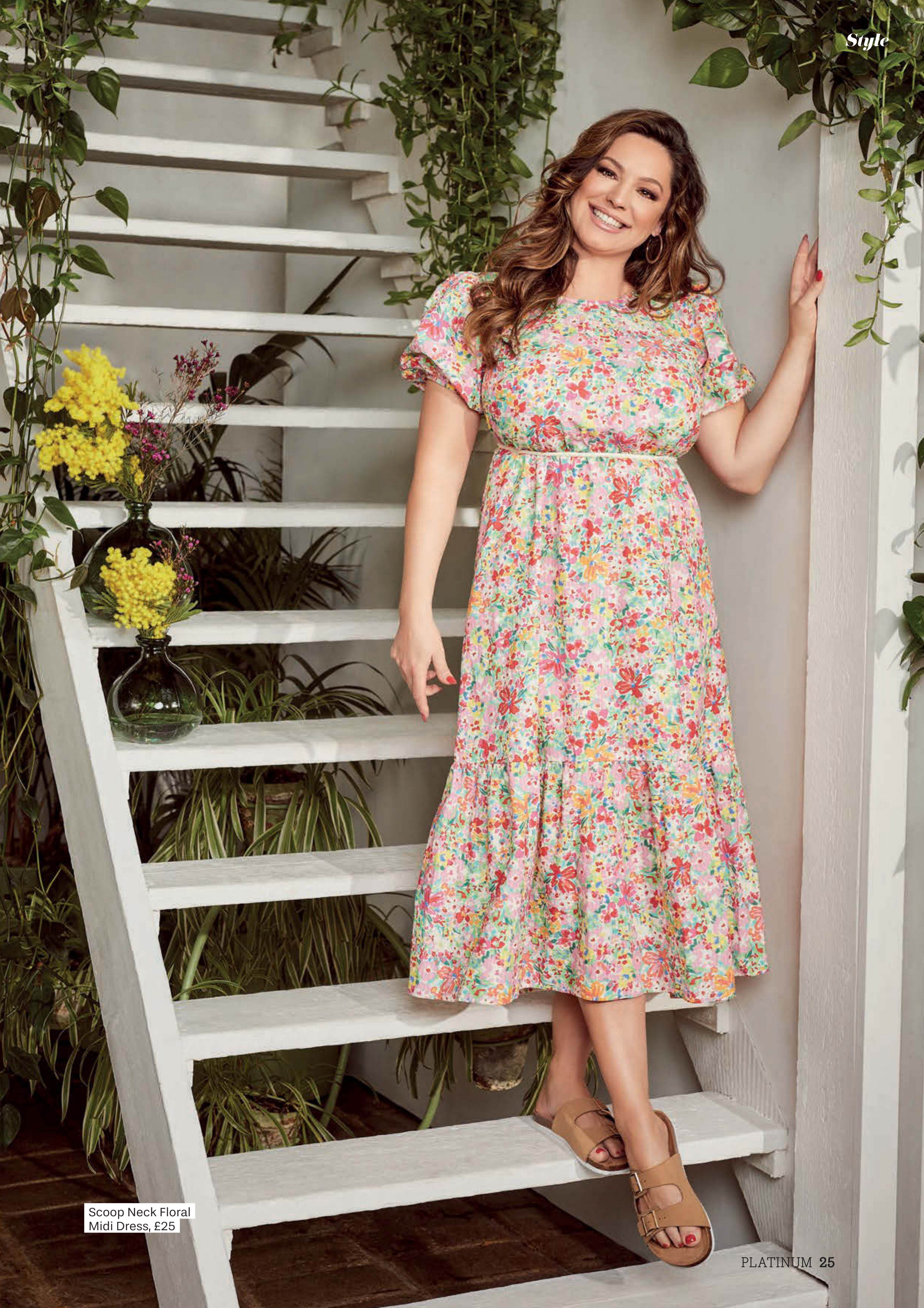
COMPILED BY: SALLY SAUNDERS

Broderie Anglaise Midi Dress, £29.50



Lime Leaf Blouse, £16;
White Jeans, £22

White Linen Shirt, £22;
Cropped Wide-leg Jeans, £25



Scoop Neck Floral
Midi Dress, £25

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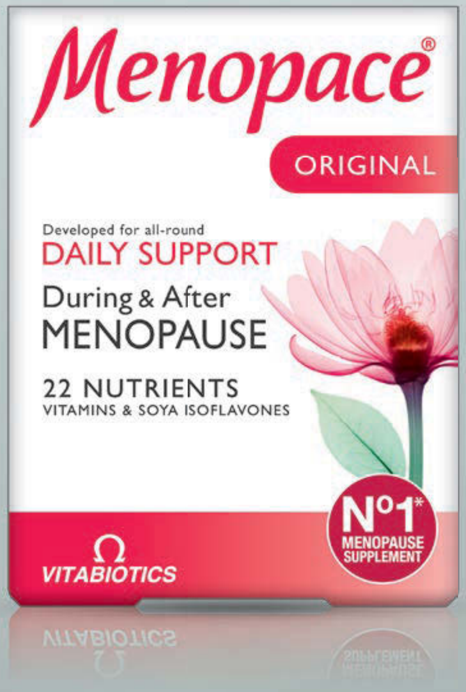
Gabby Logan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Health & wellbeing

BRING BACK THE BALANCE, TAKE A MINDFUL MOMENT, AND UNLOCK WELLNESS FOR MIND, BODY AND SOUL WITH FEELGOOD FASHION AND BEAUTY, AND INSIGHTFUL ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS

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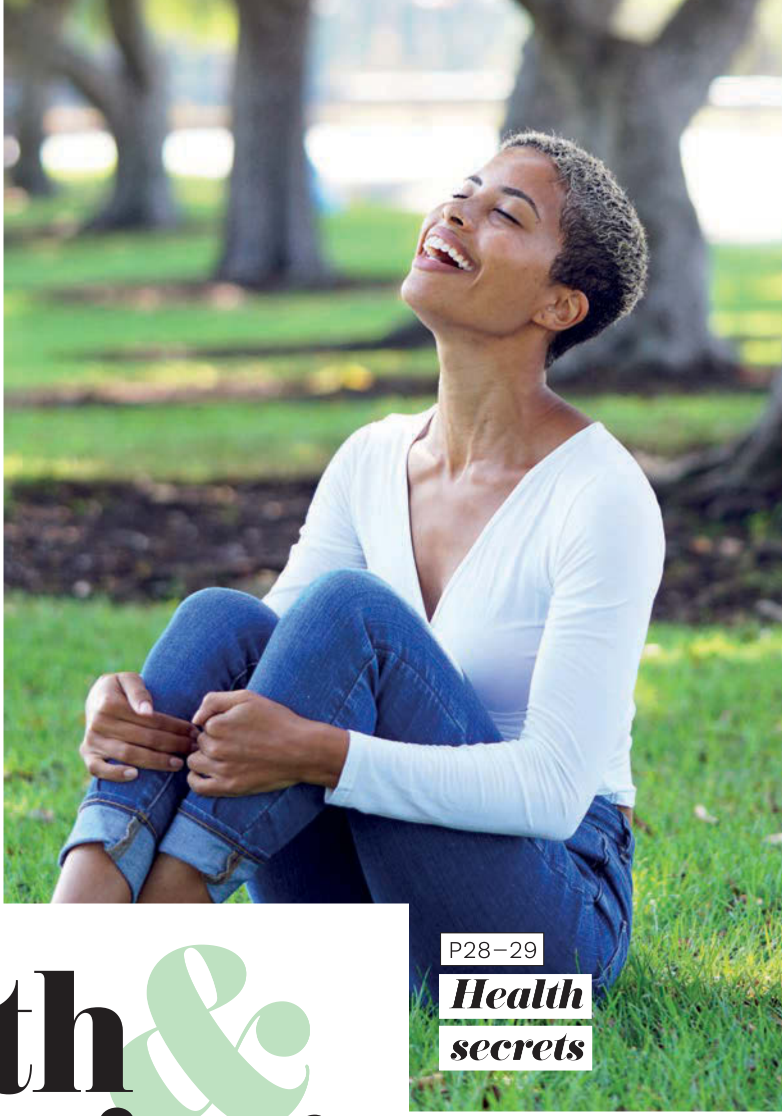
Boost energy in an instant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Health secrets

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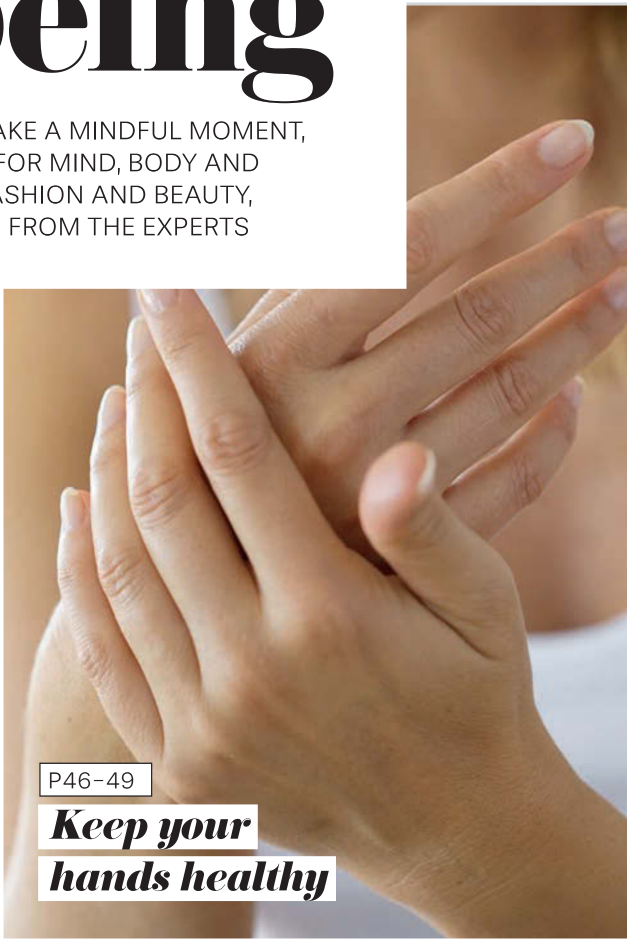
Protect your skin from the sun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Keep your hands healthy

DR DAWN HARPER'S

HEALTH SECRETS

WE ALL WANT TO FIND WAYS TO LIVE NOT JUST LONGER, BUT *BETTER*. HERE, GP DR DAWN HARPER SHARES HER TIPS ON HOW TO SAFEGUARD YOUR MENTAL HEALTH...

There is no doubt, I am seeing a lot more people in surgery of all ages struggling with their mental health. In fact, new data shows that three quarters of people in Britain report feeling anxious. Of course, a bit of anxiety can help us focus and take extra care, but for millions of people, anxiety has a negative impact on daily life – and for around one in four of us, anxiety has meant missing out on social events. I can't remember the last time I did a surgery without seeing someone showing symptoms of stress or anxiety. Some need medication, but many don't, so here are my top five tips on managing anxiety yourself…

1 GET MOVING

Earlier this year, NHS-initiative Every Mind Matters launched a new campaign to encourage people to make the first move for their mental health, to reduce symptoms of anxiety. Physical activity is good for our physical health, but it also increases the production of feelgood hormones and reduces the symptoms of stress and anxiety.

Sadly, 90 per cent of British adults don't achieve the NHS-recommended 150 minutes of exercise per week, but when it comes to moving to improve mental health, any amount of physical activity can help. You don't have to commit to regular gym sessions or training to run a marathon. Even one minute of brisk walking counts as activity. If you're struggling to get started, the NHS has a couple of free apps to help you on your way:

● **Couch to 5k** A running app for beginners. You can choose your coach from a range of famous voices, and can go from total inactivity to running 5k in as little as nine weeks – or longer, if you prefer.

● **Active 10** This app records every minute of walking that you do. Simply pop your phone in your pocket and away you go!

2 PRIORITISE SLEEP

If you always rely on an alarm clock or often wake feeling unrefreshed, you are not getting enough sleep, and sleep deprivation increases the risk of mental ill health. The human body likes routine – try to get up and

> "Spending time in green spaces helps reduce symptoms of stress and anxiety. If you don't have a garden, seek out local parks"

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

go to bed at the same time every day. Avoid bright lights before bedtime, as light stimulates wakefulness (we have a dimmer switch in our bathroom, for nighttime visits). Blue light from phones and tablets can also disrupt sleep, so leave devices outside of the bedroom and, if possible, invest in blackout curtains. Avoid caffeine after midday; five hours after drinking a cup of coffee, half of it is still in your system. Even better, swap to decaffeinated drinks or herbal teas. And don't rely on alcohol; it may help you get off to sleep, but it disrupts normal sleep patterns, meaning you don't get a proper recharge.

3 SPEND TIME IN NATURE

Spending time in green spaces helps reduce symptoms of stress and anxiety. If you don't have a garden, seek out local parks, and think about bringing nature indoors; having plants in your home can improve mental health.

Consider, too, spending time with animals. Just stroking a dog has been shown to have a calming effect on the mind and can even lower blood pressure. If you don't have the time or resources for a dog of your own, check out borrowmydoggy.com, where you can link up with dog owners looking for help with dog walking or dog care.

4 TAKE A PROBIOTIC

We have known for decades that the brain talks to the gut. Everyone has had that queasy feeling before a big interview or an exam but, in recent years, we have become aware that it is a two-way conversation. We each have around two kilos of good bacteria in our gut, called the microbiome. These bacteria 'talk' to our brain, and it is thought that maintaining a healthy microbiome can improve mental health. There is a lot of research going on into the role that the microbiome could play in everything from depression to Parkinson's. Taking a good quality probiotic each day helps promote a healthy microbiome and could reduce symptoms of anxiety.

5 ST JOHN'S WORT

Lots of people tell me they really don't want to take medication to help with anxiety. Many are worried about becoming addicted. Some tranquillisers, such as Valium, are highly addictive and should only be used in the short term, anyway. A group of drugs called SSRIs can be very effective at managing stress and low mood, but if you really don't want to take medication, it may be worth considering taking St John's Wort, which has been shown to be very effective at dealing with mild to moderate depression and anxiety.

Live Well To 101 **(Headline, £10.99) was my 12th book and, without a doubt, my favourite. It has changed my life for the better. There is nothing in the book that requires you to train for a marathon, climb Everest, or give up alcohol forever, but I learned an awful lot from my centenarians. I hope you will too!**

DOUBLE YOUR ENERGY *in 30 days!*

HEALTH COACH TRAINER **CAROLYN ST JOHN LODER** OF THE HEALTH COACHES ACADEMY SHARES THE SECRETS FOR HOW TO CHANGE YOUR MINDSET – AND YOUR LIFE!

For many women, life can mean putting everyone else first – your partner, your kids, grandkids, elderly parents (it doesn't really matter who they are, there's likely a long list of people you help out on a regular basis!) – while your own needs slip steadily to the bottom of the pile, something you'll sort out on Monday, or in the summer, or in September...

But your health should never be something you put off until tomorrow. If you want to improve your energy, you need to have a mindset shift about how you want to live your life *right now*. It's time to ask yourself: 'Who am I in the world, and who do I want to be? What's important to me as a human being?' When I work with people, the very first thing we do is to ask the question: 'What's not working about your life and your health, and your wellness and your happiness?' If you feel like you're lacking in energy – which, if you've read this far, is probably a feeling that resonates! – then, firstly, I'd ask what having more energy will give you. *Why* do you want more energy? Because unless you can really get connected with what difference it will make to your life, you won't be committed to the process of gaining more.

So, now, take a minute to think, on a scale of one to 10, where your energy level is right now, and what is the cost of that to you? Say it's at four out of 10. What is life like with an energy level at four? Maybe you haven't even had time to think about it! Maybe you haven't thought about the fact that you feel tired *all* the time, you don't feel like exercising, and you just grab the nearest carb to keep you going through the day. You just don't feel

WORDS: SALLY SAUNDERS. IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

well; you're tired; you're stressed; you reach for sugary snacks; you have a drink in the evening. It's hard to get up in the morning, so you reach for the coffee. You're living life on automatic pilot, getting through on adrenaline during the day and slumping in the evening.

Firstly, we have to get really clear here: what's actually going on? And what is this costing you in terms of your own vibrancy? It's then that we realise that change needs to become a *must*. So, we need to get to the root of what the issue is.

Okay, well, your energy is low. And that's probably why you're not prioritising your health, because it's just too tiring. But instead of adding another thing to your to-do list, let's first get really excited about the prospect of getting some more energy, and get you pumped up about how you can do that. Because within 30 days, your energy can go from a four to an eight.

What does life look like for you then? Would it mean you'd spend more time with your friends, and be less irritable with them? You wouldn't want to eat sugary snacks, and you'd want to go for a walk. Or would it mean more energy to put into a side hustle? Or to travel? Or to take up a new hobby? Whatever having more energy will do positively in your life, you need to start painting this picture, and vividly, and believing that your life really could be like that. And once you really believe that you can make your life better, you'll be much more keen to put some strategies in place to make it happen.

Now you're feeling excited about it, we can start to look at the whole picture of your life. And it starts with what you are eating. If you're having a lot of high-sugar foods and carbohydrates, then it's likely that your blood sugar is imbalanced, and as a result you're feeling exhausted. Easy ways you can tell if this is you is if, 20 minutes after getting up, you still feel tired. You'll be irritable mid-morning and find it difficult to concentrate and to remember things. You'll be craving carbohydrate and sugar, and by the afternoon, you'll be so tired you could literally fall asleep standing up. Your energy is just going up and down – and your mood is going up and down with it. So you're craving things that will give you a very fast energy release, and your energy is out of kilter throughout the day. It's almost impossible to eat healthily if you have an imbalanced blood sugar, because at some point, your body will demand: 'Give me sugar, or give me a coffee, because I can't carry on without it!'

To try to tackle this, a lot of women go on a really restricted eating plan, and they'll stick to it for a couple of weeks and then swing back to eating pizzas and doughnuts, because it's too restrictive. Instead, there are some simple ways to start to balance your blood sugar:

- **Eat protein with every meal**
- **Swap simple carbs (processed foods, such as cake and biscuits) for complex carbohydrates (such as fruit, vegetables, beans and whole grains), which take longer for your body to digest, so cause less of a spike**
- **Eat five smaller meals a day**
- **If you have coffee, drink it alongside a meal, so it causes less impact on blood sugar**
- **Cut out sugar in drinks**

The next thing to look at is your sleep. You might be surviving on five hours sleep, but then at work you're really tired. Your mind and your body start saying 'I need to rest. I need to go to sleep.' But you know that you have to get through your day so, instead, your body says: 'Okay, fine. Give me sugar. Give me a source of energy, because I don't have any.' So it'll make you have cravings and – bam! – there you are back in that same eating pattern again. So, getting on top of your sleep is another way to balance your blood sugar – and your mood. There are some important things to avoid before bedtime to improve your sleep:

- **Upsetting, aggressive TV shows**
- **Eating late at night – this gives your brain the wrong message**
- **Opening emails**

Sounds like a simple plan, right? And it is! If you change your mindset to make it easier to balance your blood sugar, aim for seven to eight hours sleep a night, and exercise a little more, then you will find your life – and energy levels – transformed!

COACH YOURSELF TO GET MORE EXERCISE

Exercise is another top priority when it comes to boosting energy levels. Our minds tell us we're too tired to exercise, but for the vast majority of people, any form of exercise – and especially being outside in the fresh air – actually gives us *more* energy. Discover three ways to train yourself into pulling your trainers on...

1

BECOME ACCOUNTABLE

You decide that after work you're going to go for a walk. But when you get home, you're tired – you don't want to do it. I'm going to coach you to do it anyway. Think now: Where are you going to go? How long will you walk for? What preparations do you need to put in place? So you might decide, 'Well, I'll get home at six o'clock. I'll go for 30 minutes, and I'll go to the park.' Really get yourself into that head space.

Now, I want you to tell me what's in that for you. What will it give you if you do that? You might think: 'I'll be pleased with myself, which will probably help to reduce my stress after work. Plus, I'll have a separation between work and home.' And these are all great reasons. But when it comes to it, you still might not feel like it. So I say, great, you're going to go to that park and see that gorgeous oak tree that you love. So just send me a picture of the oak tree when you're there. Now you're thinking 'I don't feel like it. But I said to Carolyn that I would do it: I have to send that bloomin' picture!'

Now, you don't really have to send the picture to me! But make a promise to a friend – and she to you – and see if you can find that same motivation.

2

FIND A FRIEND

It might be that you've decided to go for a walk before work. But it's raining – so you don't go. Unless, of course, you've committed to meet a friend. Exercising with a friend can increase your energy levels, and bolster your social life. If your sense of energy on a scale of one to 10 is a three, ask what impact walking with a friend twice a week would have on your satisfaction level with your social life, and open yourself up to more human connection.

3

GET INSPIRED

If you're lacking in motivation, try tapping into other people's stories. Get some good books, start learning and reading, and be inspired! You can work with a health coach – it's their job to motivate you – but you can also do it yourself. Get yourself into the right mindset and make your reading about health, wellness, exercise, other people who have overcome challenges, and people who have restored their health. Immerse yourself in that world and get motivated!

Food *for* Thought

IF WE LEARN TO 'HEAR' OUR HUNGER, AND ADOPT A MORE MINDFUL MINDSET, WE CAN CLIMB OFF THE DIET MERRY-GO-ROUND FOR GOOD, DISCOVERS **KELLIE GILLESPIE-WRIGHT**

We've heard the experts tell us time and time again that we need to change our relationship with food. And, hands up, who else is sick of dieting? Especially since studies show that most diets don't even work in the long term, with 95 per cent of those who lose weight regaining it within the next five years. So could the answer to our woes be to become more mindful about our eating?

Adopting mindful practices is a way to get off the dieting rollercoaster and make us more watchful over what we eat. It aims to transform our relationship with food by encouraging a more holistic point of view. Ultimately, this means we have a better chance of understanding what foods nourish us and help us stay healthy, while also encouraging a deeper appreciation of every mouthful we eat.

> "An essential aspect of mindful eating is becoming curious about the sensations of hunger"

In its simplest terms, mindful eating is about connecting head and body, being present in the moment, focusing on what we're eating, and noticing when our body is full. Just by slowing down and paying attention to the way we eat can help us to make better food choices and manage cravings.

It works by combating the 'mindless' eating practices that lead us astray, such as eating on the go or eating until we're fit to burst, allowing us to not only make more nutritious choices but also foster a healthier relationship between food and our body.

'Mindful eating is about having better quality eating experiences, feeling relaxed around food, and not feeling that food is the enemy,' says nutritional consultant Emma Randall. 'Mealtimes shouldn't be a battleground; food is there to be enjoyed.'

She adds: 'Eating mindfully is about noticing your food, savouring the flavour of what you're eating, and paying attention to your body's signals, such as whether you're enjoying the food, whether you actually need to be eating, and when you've had enough to eat – but it's also about giving yourself choices and permission.'

Randall emphasises that, when it comes to mindful eating, no one food is 'bad' – it's how often you eat that food and how much of it you eat that counts. 'For people who have a long history of following weight-loss diet plans, their "diet head" tells them that foods are either "allowed" or "forbidden"; and, yet, if we deny ourselves the foods we love, we only end up wanting them more.'

WHERE ARE YOU HUNGRY?

The first step is checking in with your body and identifying your hunger, says Emma Hackett, a wellbeing coach with a special interest in mindful eating. 'One of the essential aspects of mindful eating is becoming curious about the sensations of hunger, developing the ability to listen to bodily signals, and learning to recognise which hunger it is that's making us eat,' she says. 'There are many reasons that compel us to eat and drink: these are known as the Eight Hungers of Mindful Eating. The most basic hunger is our body's request for food, and if we were able to only respond to stomach hunger and body hunger, we would eat in a very simple way.

MAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

‘However, because we take pleasure and delight in food, it calls to all of our senses and encourages us to eat for reasons other than physical hunger. The other six hungers have the power to create the desire to eat, even if we’re not physically hungry, and include eye hunger, nose hunger, mouth hunger, mind hunger, heart hunger and thirst.’

By encouraging us to analyse our hunger and question where it’s coming from, mindful eating enables us to untangle and separate these different experiences of hunger so we can respond to them in the most appropriate way. This means eating and drinking when the body requires fuel and hydration, and nourishing ourselves in different ways when we are feeling hunger of the heart and mind.

FOCUS ON THE FOOD

When we know where our hunger is coming from and have decided that food is the only answer, the next step is to ‘drop the distractions’.

How many times have you sat down with some popcorn to watch a movie and, before the opening credits have ended, the popcorn is finished and you can’t even remember eating it? You’re not alone: research from the University of Bristol has found that people eat up to 100 per cent more when they’re distracted than they would have otherwise.

‘To get the most out of mindful eating, it’s crucial to be fully present with the food we’re eating in any given moment,’ says Hackett. ‘So put your phone away, switch off the TV, and step away from your computer. Focus on the food in front of you and concentrate your mind on your mouth.’

Once we bring our attention to the entire experience of eating, we stop getting lost in the thinking mind and become less caught up in any complicated emotions we might have around food. Quite simply, we allow ourselves to be reacquainted with the pleasure of eating.

‘This is important because the mind has two distinct functions: thinking and awareness,’ adds Hackett. ‘When we are distracted by the TV or our phones, the thinking function takes priority and we’re not fully aware of the food in our mouth. We can eat an entire meal and not taste more than a bite or two, leaving us dissatisfied and wanting more.’

Another reason we may reach for an after-dinner snack during an evening on the couch is that multitasking during mealtimes can hamper our brain’s ability to gauge exactly how much we ate. If we don’t remember eating, neither does our ‘mind hunger’, and it thinks we still need food. The same study from Bristol showed that memories of the food we consume influence how hungry we feel later, and distractions can influence the formation of these memories, leading to greater consumption of food later on.

> “There will always be external triggers to eating, but by slowing down and thinking first, we can make much more mindful food choices”

ENGAGE THE SENSES

We might think: ‘The problem is that I love food too much.’ But if that’s the case, why do we eat while driving, reading a book, or while watching TV? The truth is we rarely appreciate our food enough to satisfy all our senses. When was the last time you tasted every bite of a meal or appreciated how it looks (eye hunger), how it smells (nose hunger) or how the different textures feel (mouth hunger)?

Hackett says: ‘When you sit down to eat, take a moment to really look at the food. Appreciate the colours, smell the aromas. As you eat, notice the tastes and textures. Ask yourself how the food makes you feel, and really savour the things you put into your mouth. By doing this, you will discover that mindful eating is the best flavouring!’

TAKE YOUR TIME

The final cornerstone of mindful eating is simple: just ‘slow down’.

Chew your food slowly, take time to savour the flavour and appreciate each mouthful. Put your fork down between bites and let your body catch up to your brain. It takes about 20 minutes for your stomach to signal to your brain that it's full, so give yourself time to digest the meal and get in tune with the feeling of fullness and satisfaction that you get from eating. Learning to pause and check-in with our stomach hunger while we are eating can help us become more aware of the difference between stomach fullness, which is a measure of volume in our stomach, and satisfaction, which is an emotional response to what we are eating.

Research has found that slow eating (and lots of chewing) helps trigger the release of gut hormones that aid digestion. It also releases endorphins that relieve stress, which in itself can often be a cause of overeating.

'The more we chew, the more the brain registers that food is being eaten, and we've got a better chance of feeling more satisfied after a meal or snack,' says Randall. 'This is why fast eating is often linked to overeating, particularly if it's mindless too, which usually happens when we're distracted, or when we're eating for emotional reasons, such as feeling upset, stressed or bored.'

But this new way of interacting with food takes practice, and as Randall points out, 'There will always be external triggers to eating (such as the sight and smell of food), but by slowing down and thinking first, we can make much more mindful food choices, and can end up feeling a lot better for it too.'

She adds: 'If you feel you've made a "bad" food choice, move on – don't let things snowball – and ask yourself how you can make a choice you are happier with at the next eating opportunity. Perfect eating doesn't exist, so it's about making the best food choices we can in the current circumstances we find ourselves in, and not beating ourselves up if it doesn't go according to plan.'

And always remember: food is just food – it's our relationship to it that matters.

Halt hay fever!

BANISH ITCHY EYES AND A RUNNY NOSE CAUSED BY HAY FEVER BY TRYING OUT OUR HISTAMINE-BUSTING TIPS AND TRICKS

Hay fever might be more associated with the spring months, but this year scientists have said the peak will last right up until mid to late July – possibly because of our late spring – so if you suffer, it's well worth taking the time now to sort it out to help you enjoy the weeks ahead. You may already know the cause: it's an over-reaction by your immune system to a normally harmless substance (an allergic reaction). Your immune system mis-identifies the substance – usually a type of pollen or spore from a plant – as dangerous, and produces an antibody which then triggers the production of histamine. It's this that leads to the swelling, mucus, itching and burning in areas, such as the throat, nose and eyes, that we call hay fever. As these symptoms can easily be confused with a cold, the easiest way to tell the difference is through your mucus. Hay fever mucus is usually clear and colourless, and the nose feels itchy. With colds, the nasal mucous discharge can be green and you may also have a temperature.

WHEN DOES IT STRIKE?

It can strike any time between late February and November but, as this country experiences milder, wetter winters, prolonged flowering seasons from native plants lengthen the hay fever season. In fact, the average length of any given flowering or spore season has increased significantly.

RELIEVE SYMPTOMS

'Lifestyle adjustments, such as dietary changes, reducing stress and adjusting your home environment, can all make a difference. Supporting your immune system and sleeping well is beneficial, too,' says nutritional practitioner Alison Cullen. Here are her tips:

● **Diversify your gut** The more diverse your gut microbiome, the better your body works. Do this by including plenty of prebiotics – found in onions, apples and flaxseeds, for

example – and fermented foods, like kimchi, kefir, and probiotic yoghurt. Prebiotics and fermented foods boost the beneficial bacteria in your gut.

- **Avoid histamine-rich foods** Reduce your intake of alcoholic drinks, sauerkraut, vinegar, soy sauce, olives, cured meats, sour cream, buttermilk, aged cheeses, dried fruit, peanuts, aubergine, spinach, tomato, tuna, anchovies and sardines. Bananas, pineapple, papaya and strawberries may also trigger histamine release.
- **Find out the pollen forecast** Know when pollen count is high by using a forecasting app such as avogel.co.uk/health/hayfever/pollen-forecast
- **Reduce stress** Stress releases chemicals that can exacerbate inflammation and worsen nasal allergy by sensitising cells in the nasal mucosa.
- **Avoid dairy products** Dairy can cause mucus formation, making hay fever symptoms worse.
- **Drink nettle tea** Nettle has a natural antihistamine effect. Drinking herbal teas or water will also reduce the general level of inflammation in the body.
- **Exercise** Regular exercise can help improve your hay fever symptoms. Aim for five 30-minute sessions of exercise each week to feel the benefits.

WORDS: ALISON HARDINGE. IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Natural products to try...

1 Two weeks before your symptoms usually kick in, start taking Pollinosan Hay Fever Tablets (£11.99, avogel.co.uk) twice daily. This can reduce allergic reactions significantly. Increase the dosage to three times daily if symptoms appear, or worsen.

2 Pollinosan Hay Fever Eye Drops (£13.99, avogel.co.uk) are natural drops especially formulated to soothe red, burning, itchy eyes due to hay fever allergens. Suitable for contact lens wearers, they are preservative free and contain a soothing herbal extract of chamomile and hyaluronic acid.

3 The Hay-band (£11.99, hay-band.co.uk) is another product to have on hand – literally! It works using the principles of acupressure, applying pressure to the LI-11 point on either arm, located at the end of the crease at the elbow. It's suitable for adults and children over age three.

4 Vitali-Chi Allerg-Eze Wellbeing Patches (£12 for 4, vitali-chi.co) can be worn on the skin for up to seven days in a row, to alleviate sneezes.

5 Add Vitali-Chi Immune Defense AromaFrequencies (£15, vitali-chi.co) to a scent diffuser to bolster your immune system.

Perfect your *posture* for a healthy back

TAKE A STAND AGAINST NIGGLING BACK COMPLAINTS AND ENJOY A FUTURE FREE FROM PAIN, WITH STAY-SUPPLE TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS

Now the warmer days are here, we're all looking forward to getting outside a bit more, be it to enjoy a walk on the beach or a game of tennis on the courts. But if you're one of the millions of British women suffering with backache right now, your summer might not be looking quite so rosy. The latest research shows that a staggering one in seven of us suffer from back pain most days, with six in 10 saying it affects their wellbeing. In the same Real World Research poll, 43 per cent of respondents noted that their back pain affected other parts of the body, too.

So whether you get the occasional twinge or it's affecting the way you live your life, it's time to discover what's at the root of the problem – and what you can do about it. Evidently, something needs to change.

Physiotherapist Sammy Margo, the first female physio in English football (at Barnet FC), says, 'Our spines are made up of irregular bones called vertebrae, set one on top of the other. Spongy discs between the vertebrae provide cushioning and reduce the stress caused by impact when we move. Yet our backs are fragile if we don't take proper care of them.

'Posture is a huge contributor to back pain, even more so in recent years with the rise of working from home, often from the sofa or kitchen table,' explains Margo. More than half of women over 50 are now believed to be working from home, so it is perhaps no coincidence that many of the record 2.5m workers signed off with long-term sickness in the first three months of 2023 cited back and neck issues. 'But with simple tweaks, these posture saboteurs can be made a little more spine friendly, so that as we age our backs can remain healthy and pain free.'

52%
said back pain affected their sleep.

The everyday positions leading to back pain

HUNCHED OVER THE STEERING WHEEL?

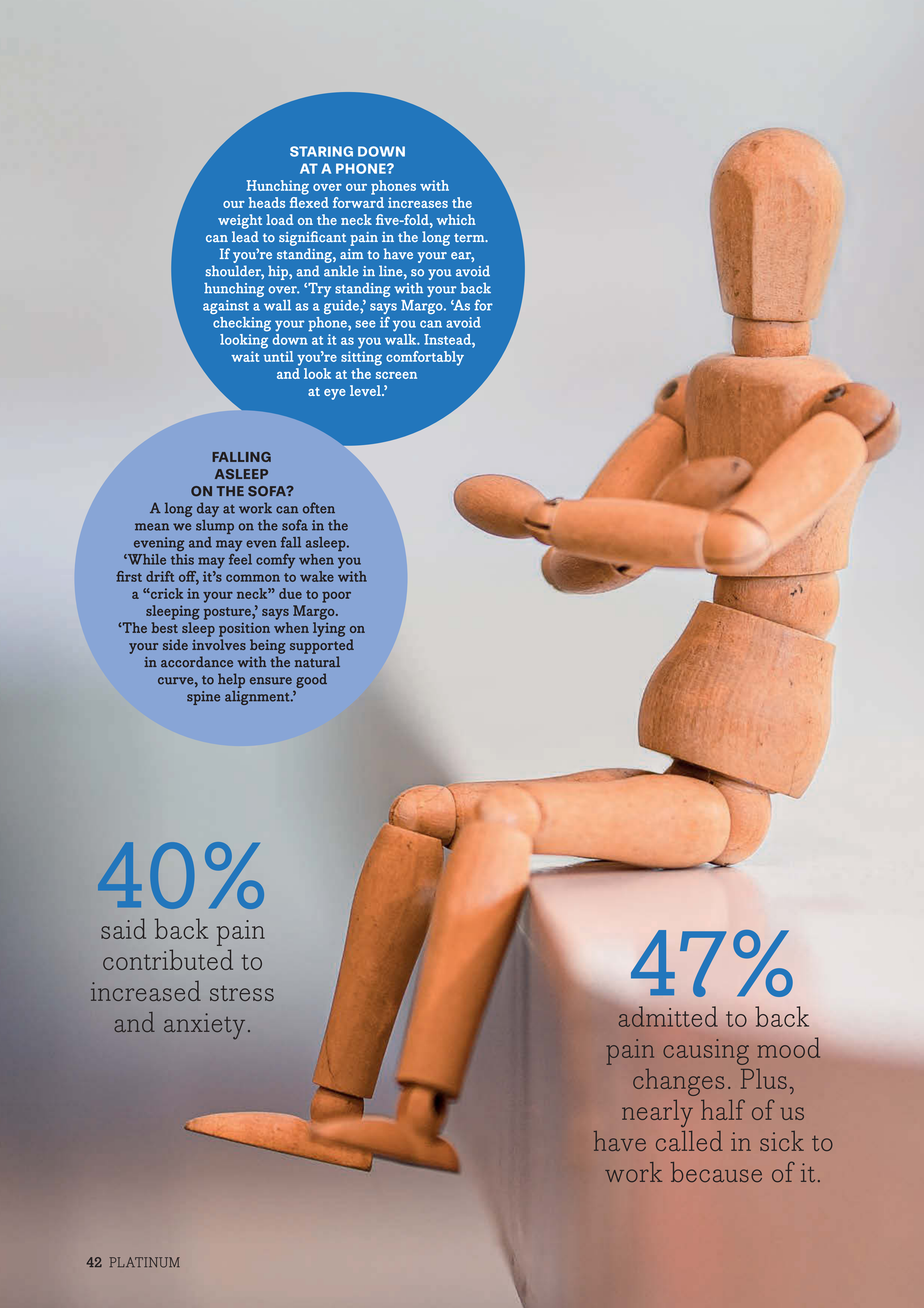
When you drive, sitting forward and hunching over the wheel, as well as remaining in one position for a long period of time, can really impact your spinal health. 'To protect your spine when driving, make sure hips are back in the seat, and knees just slightly lower than hips,' says Margo. 'Ensure that eye level is plenty above the steering wheel, and have your seat so it's ever so slightly leaning back and not completely upright at a 90-degree angle. Take regular breaks, too.'

SLUMPED AT THE DESK?

'As we get tired working at our desks, our bodies slump in the chair and our shoulders hunch over the keyboard,' says Margo. 'With many of us now either working part of the week at home and then in the office, or home working full time, lots of people work without a decent desk setup. And the situation has only become worse thanks to hybrid ways of working, as shared office equipment isn't always set up in a position to support the individual health of our necks and spines.'

Aim to sit with your ear, shoulder, and hip in line, with shoulders rested. 'Try sitting with your bum against the back of a chair and feet flat on the floor, and aim to have your screen right in front of you at eye level,' says Margo. And make sure you take breaks: more than a quarter (26 per cent) of those polled in the Mind Your Back survey said that they often find that hours have passed before they've had a chance to stretch or move around.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK



STARING DOWN AT A PHONE?

Hunching over our phones with our heads flexed forward increases the weight load on the neck five-fold, which can lead to significant pain in the long term. If you're standing, aim to have your ear, shoulder, hip, and ankle in line, so you avoid hunching over. 'Try standing with your back against a wall as a guide,' says Margo. 'As for checking your phone, see if you can avoid looking down at it as you walk. Instead, wait until you're sitting comfortably and look at the screen at eye level.'

FALLING ASLEEP ON THE SOFA?

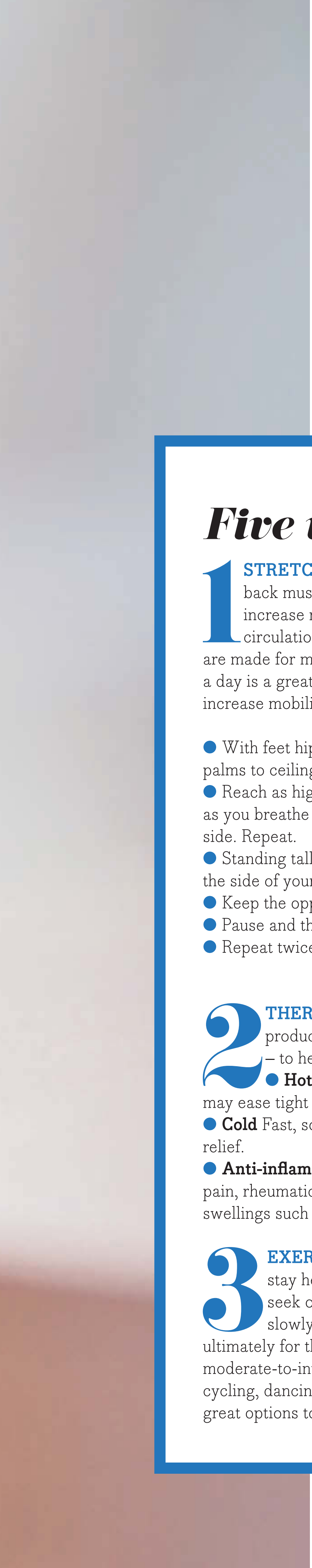
A long day at work can often mean we slump on the sofa in the evening and may even fall asleep. 'While this may feel comfy when you first drift off, it's common to wake with a "crick in your neck" due to poor sleeping posture,' says Margo. 'The best sleep position when lying on your side involves being supported in accordance with the natural curve, to help ensure good spine alignment.'

40%

said back pain contributed to increased stress and anxiety.

47%

admitted to back pain causing mood changes. Plus, nearly half of us have called in sick to work because of it.



> “Prevention is better than cure – or at the very least acting as soon as any niggles start to develop”

Five ways to tackle back pain

1 **STRETCH** Too much sitting can weaken our back muscles, so try simple stretches to help increase mobility, reduce stiffness, improve circulation and take back pain away – backs are made for moving! A good stretch several times a day is a great way to loosen tight muscles and increase mobility.

- With feet hip-width apart, raise your arms, palms to ceiling – go slowly.
- Reach as high as you can comfortably. Release as you breathe out and lower your arms to the side. Repeat.
- Standing tall, now slowly slide your hand down the side of your leg.
- Keep the opposite shoulder down.
- Pause and then slowly come back up to centre.
- Repeat twice on each side.

2 **THERAPY** Find the right topical products – hot, cold, or anti-inflammatory – to help manage your back pain.

- **Hot** Soothes muscles, aches and pains; may ease tight muscles and help ease movement.
- **Cold** Fast, soothing, and comforting cooling relief.
- **Anti-inflammatory** Effective relief from back pain, rheumatic pain, muscular aches, pains, and swellings such as strains and sprains.

3 **EXERCISE** Our backs need to move to stay healthy. If you’re new to exercise, seek out gentle activities and build up slowly to more strenuous ones. Aim ultimately for the recommended 150 minutes of moderate-to-intense exercise a week. Walking, cycling, dancing, yoga, and swimming are all great options to keep your spine supple and your muscles moving, even if you don’t normally do any exercise.

4 **POSTURE** Perfect your posture to enjoy a strong and healthy back as you age. Learn the healthiest ways to:

- **Stand:** with your ear, shoulder, hip, and ankle in line. Try standing with your back against a wall as a guide.
- **Sit:** with your ear, shoulder, and hip in line. Try sitting with your bum against the back of a chair and feet flat on the floor.
- **Sleep:** with your spine straight when lying on your side. Try placing a pillow between your legs (if you sleep on your side) or under your knees (if you sleep on your back).

5 **STRENGTHEN** Try exercises to help strengthen your back muscles and prevent pain spots developing. **To view some more suggested strengthening exercises, visit mindyourbackuk.com/strengthen**

Margo says: ‘Prevention is better than cure, or at the very least acting as soon as any niggles start to develop. The earlier you tackle any back health issues, the greater your chances of enjoying a supple and pain-free back well into old age. Wellness brand Mentholatum has a Mind Your Back campaign, which is full of information for people who want to bust back pain or take better care of their back but don’t know where to start. These five steps – stretch, therapy, exercise, posture, strengthen – could be the difference between living with chronic pain for years and ageing with a supple, healthy spine that allows you to keep enjoying all the activities that you love.’

Visit mindyourbackuk.com for more information on how to protect your spine.

FACE *in* FIVE

BEAUTY EXPERT AND *PLATINUM* REGULAR DOTTIE MONAGHAN EXPLAINS HOW TO PROTECT YOUR SKIN FROM THE SUN *AND* WEAR MAKE-UP AS USUAL!

The sun has got its hat on, and so it's important to add SPF protection to your everyday beauty regime.

I love a double-duty product that offers sun protection alongside hydration and concealment, but I'd still advise adding a skin-care base designed specifically to protect, ideally from both UVA rays (that can cause cancer and ageing) and UVB rays (that cause sunburn).

Time is of the essence in the mornings, so look for a fast-absorbing non-whitening product. Gel-type products are great for this. Allow a few minutes to let it sink in before applying your make-up on top.

Keep hair pulled back from your face and avoid putting your hands through it straight after. Be sure to read if products can be used around the eye area and, if so, avoid getting any on your eyelashes, as this may cause mascara to run or clog up.

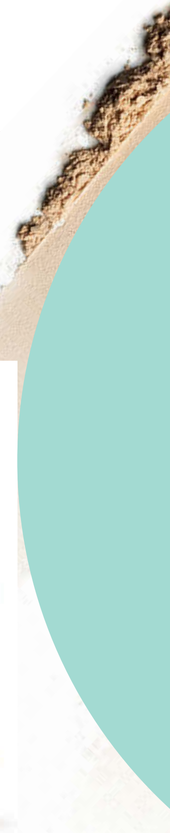
You'll need to top up protection throughout the day, too – a task not easily achieved when wearing make-up. Step up my new superheroes, a powder and a mist that can be applied over make-up and offer SPF.

If you have a favourite lipstick that doesn't offer sun protection, there's no need to bin it – just apply a clear balm with sun protection under and over the lipstick, for maximum protection.

SOS SPF 50 MOISTURISING PROTECTING SUN CREAM, £5, sosserum.co.uk

Great for sensitive skin, this is non-greasy and doesn't leave a white tinge. Plus, it won't break the bank. Win!

SOS
SPF 50
Moisturising · Protecting
Sun Cream
The answer to sensitive skin
Face & Body
50ml ℮ 1.7fl.oz



SCULPTED
AIMEE CONNOLLY
Sun Mist
SPF 50 PA++++
UVA + UVB
Broad Spectrum
Under/Over Makeup
BRUME SOLAIRE
70ML ℮ 2.36 FL. OZ.

SCULPTED BY AIMEE SPF 50 SUN MIST, £22, sculptedbyaimee.co.uk
This refreshing SPF mist works brilliantly both under and over make-up, and hydrates skin, too.

IMAGE SKINCARE PREVENTION+ DAILY PERFECTING PRIMER SPF 50, £59, image skincare.co.uk
Adoptable to most skin tones, this tinted SPF-infused primer will help blur the appearance of uneven skin texture, wrinkles and pores.

IMAGE
SKINCARE
PREVENTION+
daily
perfecting
primer
base
quotidienne
peau neuve
50
SPF/FPS
digital aging defense
broad spectrum SPF 50 sunscreen
écran solaire à large spectre FPS 50
PURE MINERAL UV FILTERS
FILTRES UV AUX MINÉRAUX PUR
tinted primer / primer base de teint
Net wt. 1 oz / 28 g

athletia
ATHLETIA
SKIN PROTECTION
UV GEL 50
SPF50+

ATHLETIA SKIN PROTECTION UV GEL SPF 30, £33; SPF 50, £38, Both athletia-beauty.co.uk
Great under make-up, this slides on smoothly, leaving no sticky feeling or white residue. And the lemon and rosemary scent is divine!

ZO SKIN HEALTH
BY ZEIN OBAGI MD
SUNSCREEN + POWDER
BROAD-SPECTRUM SPF 30
MAX.

ZO SKIN HEALTH SUNSCREEN & POWDER SPF 30, £54, zo-skinhealth.co.uk
A combined powder and brush offering buildable coverage. Available in three shades. Perfect for topping up SPF while reducing shine.

KATHERINE DANIELS PURE PIGMENT FOUNDATION DROPS, £40; DAILY DNA DEFENCE SPF 30, £59. Both katherinedaniels cosmetics.com
A perfect partnership. Combine 30:70 foundation drops to Daily Defence to create a CC cream; 50:50 for medium coverage; and 70:30 for full coverage.

KATHERINE DANIELS
PURE PIGMENT
FOUNDATION
DROPS
Flexi Cover, Flexi Colour
2
KATHERINE DANIELS
UVA
DAILY DNA
DEFENCE - SPF30
UVA+UVB, Blue Light & Pollution Protection
3 SKIN DEFENCE
BEAUTIFULLY BRITISH CONCEPTS

Like the back of your hand

REHYDRATE AND RESTORE CREPEY, WEATHER-WORN HANDS TO KEEP THEM SOFT AND SUPPLE – AND REMEDY THE TELLTALE SIGNS OF SKIN AGEING

Your hands are often one of the first places on your body to show signs of ageing. And it's no wonder: they're washed more frequently than any other body part, and this constant washing strips away your skin's natural moisture barrier. If you use regular soap, it also makes skin slightly alkaline, and skin is meant to be slightly acidic to stay in a healthy optimal state. Added to that, your hands are always exposed to the sun, and while you may remember to use SPF on your face, it's more difficult to keep those hands protected, unless you carry around hand cream containing SPF or a mini bottle of sunscreen while on the go throughout the year. Melanin spots (also widely known as brown liver, dark or age spots) increase in middle life due to sun exposure caused by overactive pigment cells. It is quite common for a single age spot to appear on the back of your hand or even a smaller cluster.

'I see this a lot in my clinics, and many clients will hide their hands, as hands are the biggest giveaway to age,' says Lorena Oberg, skincare repair expert and founder of Lorena Oberg skincare (lorenaoberg.co.uk). And it's not only pigmentation that adds years to our hands – skin laxity (when it becomes loose and crepey) often shows up more prevalently on hands, as there can be very little fat, if any, in this area. Thinner skin also means veins protrude more prominently and crepiness increases, especially as there are fewer sebum glands here. Hands can appear wrinkled as you lose fat from them.

Although it happens to everyone to a certain extent, it is particularly prevalent in Caucasians as they age, says Lucy Phillips from Kaizen Medical (kaizenmedical.co.uk). 'As

WORDS: ALISON HARDINGE. IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

you age, your skin gets thinner, natural oil production reduces, and the concentration of natural moisturising factors in the skin, such as urea, also reduce, making skin less resilient,' she adds.

'As well as dark spots, wrinkles will also be more prominent and are a symptom of photoaging,' says Dr Abha Gulati, consultant dermatologist for The Harley Street Dermatology Clinic (theharleystreet dermatologyclinic.co.uk). While slathering on hand cream won't add back lost volume, it can prevent further water loss, which can stop skin looking so crepey and dry.

'Your skin is made up of three layers: the outer keratin, the epidermis, and the dermis. If the external layers don't contain enough water, skin will lose elasticity, look dry, and feel rough,' says Dr Gulati. 'Hand creams and moisturisers add a waterproof coating to the skin, reducing evaporative loss of water. So the greasier the product, the better.' She suggests looking out for ingredients such as nicotinamide, glycerol, urea, and fatty acids, which act as water magnets and hold on to it for longer.

Collagen makes up one-third of your total body protein, and is therefore the most abundant protein in the human body. Its structural role maintains the elasticity, suppleness and look of luscious skin, says Hannah Richards, nutritionist and wellbeing coach at The Gut Clinic (thegutclinic.net). Collagen, like most things, starts to deplete after around age 30, but this is a moveable feast and is multifactorial; your lifestyle and nutrition play a huge part in anti-ageing. Collagen supplements in liquid, capsule and powder form have shot up in popularity over the past few years, promising to plump up skin from within. But how do they work?

'The number-one ingredient in a collagen product must be collagen, and it must also be free from fillers, binders and excipients such as preservatives or additives,' says Richards. When it comes to size, the smaller the collagen particles the better, as this allows an easier uptake and faster transportation of the peptides to the skin. Some products

> "As you age, your skin gets thinner and natural oil production reduces, making skin less resilient"

Restore your hands with these beauties

may also be fortified with vitamins, which are unnecessary.

It's worth noting that there's no such thing as vegan collagen, so if you are following a vegan diet, you'll have to focus on foods that contribute to collagen formation. 'Notable collagen builders include zinc, copper, vitamin C, amino acids and manganese. These help your body produce more of its own collagen,' says Richards.

NIA114
HAND
StriVectin
crepe control
BRIGHTENING & FIRMING HAND CREAM
CRÈME MAINS ILLUMINATRICE ET RAFFERMISSANTE

StriVectin Crepe Control Brightening & Firming Hand Cream (£26, strivectin.co.uk). The key ingredient here is hexylresorcinol, which promotes the reduction of hyperpigmentation by improving uneven skin tone.

SUPERFINE DAILY POWDER
BARE BIOLOGY
skinful
fast-absorbing pure marine collagen

Bare Biology Skinful Fast-Absorbing Pure Marine Collagen (£39.95, barebiology.com) contains 5000mg of type-one marine collagen peptides, to help reboot your elastin and collagen, and give skin more bounce.

NORWEGIAN FORMULA
hand cream
CONCENTRATED
Neutrogena
50 ml

Neutrogena Norwegian Formula Hand Cream Concentrated (£4.15, boots.com) is fantastic for nourishing hands and preventing transepidermal water loss, thanks to its glycerin content.

LA ROCHE-POSAY
LABORATOIRE DERMATOLOGIQUE
PIGMENTCLAR
UV SPF 30
SOIN CORRECTEUR RÉUNIFORMISANT
EVEN SKIN TONE DAILY MOISTURISER

La Roche-Posay Pigmentclar Anti Dark Spot Day Cream (£31, boots.com) contains retinol, which helps to brighten and refresh the skin. This skin tone-correcting melt-in moisturiser reduces the appearance of dark spots, making it perfect for use on your hands as well as your face.

natural relief...
made easy-peesy

- Urinary tract infections can be very painful especially when visiting the toilet, and are becoming increasingly resistant to traditional treatments such as antibiotics.
- Bladapure combines D mannose, Organic cranberry powder, inulin and key nutrients to create an inhospitable environment for bacteria to flourish which can cause infections.
- Online reviews confirm that Bladapure is one of the most popular supplements used for this common problem.

Bladapure®
A unique D-Mannose formula with key nutrients* to maintain normal electrolyte balance and acid-base metabolism
90g Powder
Food Supplement
Bladapure
que D-Mannose formula with key
nts to maintain normal electrolyte
ance and acid-base metabolism
120 Capsules
VALUE PACK

Available from all good health food stores and selected pharmacies

Healthy2U Holland&Barrett amazon

Bladapure®

★★★★☆

Rated online 4.6 out of 5 stars

wfbm HEALTHCARE

Life & times

IDEAS TO ASPIRE TO, GREAT READS TO INSPIRE YOU, AND EXPERT ADVICE TO HELP YOU LIVE A LIFE YOU LOVE, AND LOVE THE LIFE YOU LIVE

P56–57

Jane Moore seeks out some silence!

P70–73

Celebrate your friendships

P62–69

Embrace life at any age

P58–61

Living with grown-up children

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Let go of REGRET

BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS, MISSED OPPORTUNITIES – WE ALL HAVE THINGS WE WISH WE HAD – OR HADN'T – SAID OR DONE, AND THESE FEELINGS CAN FOLLOW US FOR YEARS. SO HOW CAN WE STOP BEATING OURSELVES UP AND PUT THE PAST TO REST TO ENJOY OUR FUTURE, ASKS CAROLINE BUTTERWICK

Most nights, I lie in bed, fretting over decisions I've made in the past, wishing I could go back and undo what happened. It's a common problem, but one I'd love to get over. After all, whether it's ruminating on big life decisions, such as if you should have moved house or ended a certain relationship, or just lots of little things that you wish you had done differently, feeling regretful can easily impact us negatively.

'Being stuck in constant rumination can be linked to low mood, and can signal that we may actually be experiencing a depressive episode,' explains clinical psychologist Michaela Thomas. When we then turn our attention to looking forwards, our thinking can become much more negative and anxiety-fuelled, and worrying about the future can lead to us avoiding things. We become so convinced that things will go wrong that we begin to miss out on opportunities – which, ironically, can lead to further regret.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR REGRET

As difficult as regret can be, there are ways to use these emotions to understand ourselves better. 'When regret becomes helpful is when it guides our behaviour to bring it more in line with our values,' Thomas says. 'It can be functional if it moves you towards repair.'

Regret is often mixed with other emotions, such as shame, guilt, or embarrassment. Psychotherapist Karin Peeters tells me about the difference between regret and remorse: 'Regret is about oneself, while remorse is about feeling deeply sorry for another person who was involved in a situation,' she explains.

Of course, not all regrets involve another person, but when we have hurt someone, even accidentally, this remorse can be painful. However, we can use it positively: 'With remorse, very often we feel the desire to apologise, and that is so incredibly healing,' explains Peeters. It can help us take stock of how we act towards others, and look at improving relationships where there has been past hurt.

Often, we regret missed opportunities – for example, the job we turned down because it felt like too much, only to see a colleague thrive (and wish it had been you). Or a relationship you decided not to pursue, only to continue thinking about them decades later. It can help, Thomas says, to see if there are patterns in our regrets. Do you have a tendency to turn things down, and then later wish you hadn't? Thomas says: 'We can bring a growth mindset to it, asking ourselves, "What is it that I need to learn?", "What is it that I'm not doing that I could start doing to learn from this?". And that's where we can look at failure and mistakes as learning opportunities to tweak what we're doing, to change ourselves for a different future.'

Peeters, too, highlights the importance of finding patterns: 'Often, there is a common denominator in the things that our thoughts get hooked onto,' she explains. You may blame yourself for making the wrong career move, or being in a bad relationship. The common denominator here could be that you think 'It's my fault', or 'I'm not good enough'. Recognising what this underlying thought is, Peeters says, can help you address this root cause of your regrets, such as self-doubt, anxiety, or being overly critical of yourself.

MOVING FORWARDS

While writing this article, I keep thinking of a friend who recently took a new job that meant leaving an employer she liked, but was, she thought, something that sounded great. But, a few weeks in, she realised she had made a terrible mistake. Her new boss was unkind and demanding, it was a toxic environment, and she found the work itself unfulfilling. She was quickly swallowed up by regret, wishing she could go back and warn her past self. She has now managed to find another role, but is still angry at herself for her decisions.

'It's really important to consider that when we look back, we fall into a trap called hindsight bias,' explains Thomas. 'We sit here with all the information we have at hand in the present moment and we think, "Why did I do that?". But we can only ever act on the information we have in the moment, which is now the past. We beat ourselves up, yet we didn't then have access to the knowledge we have now, and had no idea how events would unravel.'

As much as my friend is upset, there was no way she could have known what things would be like. We chat about it over coffee, and suddenly – wonderfully – she smiles, as she shares how she has learnt about herself from the experience. Feeling content and happy in a workplace is important to her, she's realised. In scenarios like this, the idea of hindsight bias reminds us to be compassionate to ourselves, and to realise what it was about the decision we made that didn't work for us, and how we may act differently next time.

Peeters tells me about a technique she uses with clients where she asks them to play out a court case where the thing they have done or not done is being scrutinised. 'You can get a really nice overview of what there is to learn, and what the causes and conditions were that brought you to the circumstance,' says Peeters. 'So it brings a lot of understanding and softness of the bigger picture, and why somebody did what they did.' This can also help you forgive yourself and show self-compassion.

It is helpful, according to Peeters, to look at the intention behind why we did something. 'When we regret something, we look at the result, and the outcome is very often not under our control. But if we can look back at the original intention, and find it was good, then that's something to really hold onto.'

DEALING WITH REGRETFUL THOUGHTS

As hard as we try to move on, regrets can still spiral in our minds as we try to sleep. What can we do in this situation? Firstly, Thomas says, accept that these thoughts are there. She compares the feeling of regret to a cat sitting on your bed – it may come and lie down near you, and you're aware of it and acknowledge its presence, but you don't try to push it away or give it attention, you just leave it be.

The more you can sit with your feelings of regret, the less scary they get. 'There is a paradox that they

> "Look at failure and mistakes as learning opportunities to tweak what we're doing, to change ourselves for a different future"

actually tend to linger less, if you allow them to come in,' explains Thomas. 'It's like having a beach ball that you try to push down underneath the surface – the more you push it down, the more tension you're using to hold it out of sight. But when you release it and let it bob along next to you, it will eventually drift away.'

As you acknowledge these regrets, you can say to yourself that it is understandable that these thoughts are on your mind. Then, Thomas says, try counting your breaths in and out – if you get distracted, just keep on bringing your thoughts back to the breath.

Lying in the dark, I'm feeling annoyed at myself for a work opportunity I turned down. But I recognise that I have learnt from it – it's taught me to believe in myself more, because one of the reasons I didn't pursue it is my ever-present imposter syndrome. I've realised now if I were to face a similar opportunity, I would explore it more. This way of thinking helps me stop beating myself up over it: I grow from it.

As the regret turns around my head, I acknowledge it, like the weight of a cat curled beside me, and that the reason it is there is because it's about something that matters to me. I tell myself it is okay to have these thoughts, and then focus on my breathing, the warm tickle of air in and out of my nostrils. The regret doesn't just disappear, but I'm able to gently shift my focus onto something else. I feel calmer, more content, and yes, I manage to drift off to sleep not long after.

Regrets are a part of life – they can eat us up or leave us fearful – but we can use them to better understand ourselves, and to make changes that are right for us.

> **"The more you can sit with your feelings of regret, the less scary they get"**

MOORE'S MONTH

SILENCE IS GOLDEN, DISCOVERS OUR COLUMNIST, *LOOSE WOMEN* STAR AND SEASONED CITY DWELLER **JANE MOORE**, AFTER AN ESCAPE TO THE COUNTRY

Earlier this month, I headed to the countryside to stay with a friend for the weekend, and initially felt unnerved by the sound of complete silence. After all, I live in the heart of London, where the soundtrack to daily life is emergency services' sirens, heavy traffic, car alarms, lorries rattling over speed bumps… you name it.

Noise is so common that you don't really notice the effect it has until you *don't* hear it, and realise how much calmer you feel.

Consequently, I slept like a baby and actually had a *lie-in* until 9am – something I *never* do at home.

I'm a good sleeper, but pretty much anywhere you live in our capital, the low hum of aeroplane noise is ever present, and can start as early as 5am. Then there are the office workers who set off around 7am, chatting on their phones outside your window and slamming their car doors, followed shortly afterwards by the school-run brigade with their laughing/crying children, barking dogs tied to prams, and more phone chatter.

After that, it's the delivery lorries, taking wrong turns and beeping as they reverse, or parking in the middle of the road and prompting other drivers to honk in frustration.

By contrast, sitting alone in my friend's conservatory and looking out over her fields, I could hear nothing except birdsong. It was a beautiful half hour of utter stillness in my mind. So I can see why frazzled people check themselves in to meditation retreats to get away from all the distractions, and simply concentrate on their own stillness. It's imperative for our mental wellbeing.

> "Noise, noise, and more noise – there's no escaping it!"

Sundays are a little calmer in the city, but now that it's summer, what's the betting that the second my head hits the garden sun lounger for an afternoon snooze, some unthinking halfwit four doors down will decide it's the perfect time to try out their new leaf blower that sounds like a punctured hovercraft?

Or decide it's a good day to start tinkering with their car, revving the engine and drilling something metal that sets your teeth on edge?

And whilst children playing in the garden is a lovely sound, an under-exercised, over-excited dog barking *all day long* is not. Take it to the local park and wear it out, for heaven's sake.

Noise, noise, and more noise. There's no escaping it.

These days, even the supposedly 'silent carriage' on a train isn't immune from having that inane 'see it, say it, sort it' slogan piped through the tannoy with annoying regularity. Or regular messages telling you what you can buy in the buffet car. Yeah, tea, coffee, sandwiches… we *know*, so please give it a rest.

I'm currently looking for a new place to live and, in the pursuit of an easier life, am leaning towards getting a modern, 'lock-up-and-leave' flat. But the only thing that's making me hesitant is the prospect of moving in and discovering that the people above me are like those fellow guests we've all experienced in hotels, who inexplicably start dragging the furniture across the floor at 2am.

Or that below me there might be a heavy-metal fan who likes to play it at full volume. No thanks.

Of course, the obvious solution would be to move out to the countryside and be surrounded by the empty fields that make my friend's house such a haven of peace.

But, despite all of the irritations listed above, I'm a city dweller through and through. And, besides, my kids live in London, and so do most of my friends.

So it's ear plugs at night, and perhaps I'll invest in a pair of noise-cancelling headphones to wear in the garden to drown out the power tools for the next couple of months.

Failing that, I might head to Kerala to join the nuns of the Poor Clares Monastery, who primarily maintain silence and only speak between 12 and 1.30pm each day. Bliss.

Buy of the month

I've always had a croaky voice, but I've discovered that dairy – particularly milk – makes it worse. I'd successfully switched to milk alternatives with just one exception: my morning cuppa. Every soya/oat/almond product I tried made it taste strange. Then, I discovered Alpro's My Cuppa, which, whilst still being soya-based, tastes almost identical to milk. I can even have it on cereal. Hallelujah.

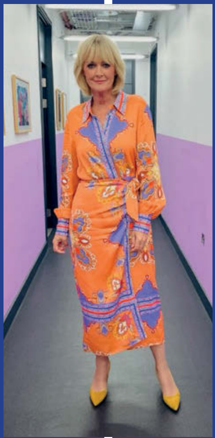
Jane's diary

I can think of few things more scary than walking onto a stage and having to make the audience laugh. But that's what my *Loose Women* colleague Judi Love is doing with aplomb on her nationwide tour, and all of us have been to see her at various venues to give our support.

Here's Judi with me, Nadia Sawalha, Kaye Adams and Frankie Bridge, backstage at Guildford's G Live venue, where she brought the house down. She's a comedy queen.

Look of the month

The sarong style of this multi-coloured wrap dress from & Other Stories makes it perfect to take on holiday and team with sandals for a casual night out. Or dress it up with killer heels for a summer wedding or formal dinner. These suede heels are from LK Bennett.



What EMPTY NEST?

MOTHERHOOD IS A LABOUR OF LOVE, THEN BABIES GROW UP AND FIND THEIR OWN WAY IN THE WORLD... BUT WITH ALMOST FIVE MILLION ADULTS NOW LIVING AT HOME WITH THEIR PARENTS – AROUND 700,000 MORE THAN A DECADE AGO – THE ONGOING RESPONSIBILITY CAN WEIGH HEAVILY. VEE SEY STEERS HER FAMILY TOWARDS MODERN DOMESTIC HARMONY

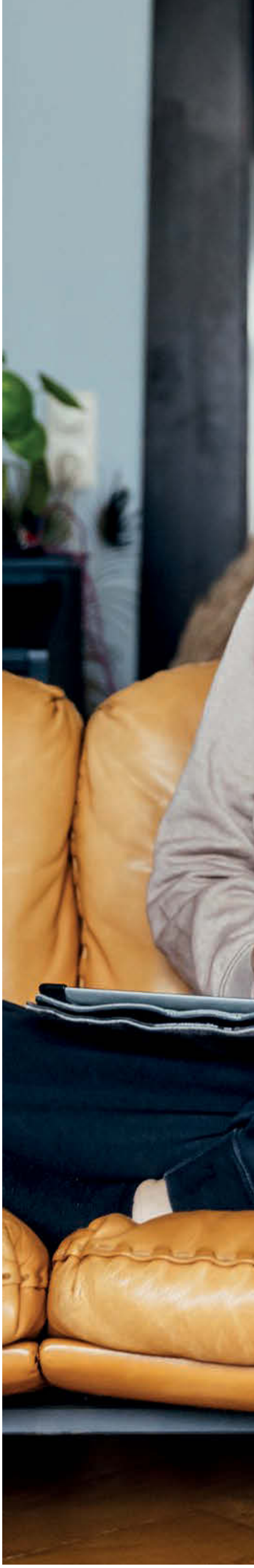
Bellies are full, PJs are on, the home is cosy and the wolf has backed away from the door. My two children are watching a film with a deafening soundtrack that pierces right through me, and I can barely hear the news on the radio as I put on a load of washing and finish up in the kitchen. I have brought home the bacon, kept house, and nurtured my young for another day.

'How old are your little ones?' you might ask, and the answer is somewhat embarrassing for all three members of my nuclear family: my kids are in their 20s and, while I adore the bones of them, I am worn down by this level of parental care, not to mention financial support, which they still need and I desperately want to provide. But I know co-residential motherhood for two and a half decades is taking its toll on me, and I resent it at times.

While some empty nesters are lamenting their aloneness with longing, and liberated others are celebrating time to travel, freedom to pursue their passions, and money for themselves once the children have moved out, my offspring are of the boomerang variety: the rising phenomenon of adult children returning to the family home – after their studies, and due to the unattainable cost of housing – to stretch a parent's tolerance, devotion and bank account. The ONS reports a 46 per cent increase in the number of young people aged 20 to 34 living with their parents, while research by the London School of Economics suggests that intergenerational cohabitation can have a negative impact on a parent's quality of life. And here we are…

Bethan O'Riordan, a psychotherapist and parenting expert, offers comfort, telling me that I am not to blame for continuing to 'be mother' as I did when they were helpless, instead of telling them to look after themselves (which remains on the tip of my tongue). Rationally, I see that I am being my own worst enemy taking everything on my shoulders and doing them no favours with regards independence – but I can't seem to stop myself. 'The mother's role will always be to give, provide and care, and this should naturally end at a point where the child becomes an adult, at around the age of 18,' explains O'Riordan. But, while they are still under my wing and roof, 'not taking care of them goes against the grain of everything we are told as mothers', she adds.

O'Riordan says that my wellbeing may be coming second place to my maternal role, which is inherent within the family system. 'The difficulty with this situation is that none of the adults have the opportunity to differentiate, individuate and become their own person who is not answerable to anyone else. Living at



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home means that there will always be a level of emotional and physical enmeshment whereby the child never gets to move away from being a child and the mother remains the mother.' So it seems we are all doing what comes naturally, but for an unnaturally long time. How, then, do I deal with feeling put upon while we play the extended version of happy families – and then not feel that I have let them down by insisting on change?

'In practical terms, can the adult children do more tasks and take ownership of more inside the household?' she probes, and of course I know they can. It's clear that I will have to snap the rod I have made for my own back and renegotiate our terms and conditions, but how can we thrive psychologically as we recreate the norm? 'From an emotional perspective,' says O'Riordan, 'what the mother can do is take a stand for a better and higher functioning of herself. Families work as an emotional unit, but when one person steps out of their patterned position and away from the mental concept of togetherness, towards a more helpful way of being, this changes the dynamic. If the mother changes for the better, this encourages the children to do the same, then being at home together doesn't feel quite so together.'

THE MARTYRED MOTHER

With reflection, I realise that my own mum's self-sacrificing and long-suffering nature has permeated my parenting and, to deal with my guilt about pulling away for the greater good, O'Riordan recommends self-compassion – although she admits it sounds airy-fairy as a solution. 'However,' she stresses, 'if we look at the function of guilt, it can ease it: Guilt is our mind's way of ensuring that we do no harm. Imagine how wild we would be if we had no system letting us know that it wasn't okay to do certain things! But the most important part of guilt is to be able to contextualise it and understand it. The most powerful way of

> "It seems we are all doing what comes naturally – for an unnaturally long time"

developing the skills for this is by cultivating self-kindness, which is a true mental strength that helps us understand ourselves. It's like having an inner ally who always has our best interests at heart. It allows us to see our feelings as valid and offers us awareness and the opportunity to create actionable steps towards alleviating our suffering.'

To complicate matters, we have the flip side of my complaining, which is that motherhood has been my focus all my adult life; I enjoy babying them when I am in the mood and the notion of me being surplus to requirements fills me with sadness. 'This is a matter of identity,' explains O'Riordan. 'Everything we do holds a function, so it's important to take an objective step back and ask: "What is the function of what I am doing, and how do I want things to be?". Historically, caregiving was the role of women, but things are changing. I think women and mothers are caught in limbo between old stereotypes and the new versions of who we want to be.' And then she drops the bombshell: It may be that I need 're-mothering' to break the pattern of hard-done-by mothers in our family.

The idea of mothering another person, even myself, is unappealing – but the way my mother felt about motherhood, and how that made me feel as a child, is certainly at play here. But I don't have to suffer because my mother portrayed herself as a victim of motherhood, and I don't have to protect my children from feeling that they are a burden, as I felt. 'Re-mothering is a process of exploring what is helpful and serves the individual and family well, and observing and changing what does not. When we were children, we absorbed our mother's shadow side – the parts that were unspoken, fears and regrets – and often this is what is repeating itself. It's about figuring out what mothering values were projected on to you and what are your own,' she says.

'The tricky thing about a perceived abandoning of our (even adult) children is that as our children age, our minds and bodies release emotional memories of what it was like to be that age. We remember the hurt and the pain and unconsciously don't want to recreate that within our children. Many parents are fearful to say no to their children but, in fact, the more that you can be congruent to you, the more that allows a child to be congruent to themselves.' This speaks to me loud and clear, and I realise that I do not have to be trapped in unwilling selflessness to be a good mother to two grown-ups. It also tells me that I must lead the way and they will follow.

As I prepare to empower myself as a daughter, woman and mother, O'Riordan outlines the way forward: 'Take the focus away from the children and move it to your process of becoming an individual within the family, because awareness is not enough. Explore your needs – nutrition, exercise, who you spend time with, how you enjoy life, your lifestyle choices and sleep… all the parts that make up you. Gain a greater sense of being you – what makes you feel good, fulfilled and at peace – and do more of it!'

Perhaps my children should have moved out by now, but I want my still-full nest to be welcoming and nurturing, for all three of us. I can't deny that I have regrets about aspects of the childhood my children have had: the years I was physically absent working evenings, emotionally absent, preoccupied with my love life after my divorce, grief-stricken after my mother died, and when I cooked spaghetti for so many days on the trot that they begged me to stop. I can see that, rather than my children being selfish giant toddlers, it is I who has shaped the mechanisms of our household – to right my self-perceived wrongs while continuing a legacy of martyrdom that I have fostered. I will always be their mother. I will always love them. But it is time for a new era in the family home that we share – because none of us can spread our wings and fly when I am clipping them.

"I do not have to be selfless to be a good mother to two adults"

Love and money

Armed with psychological awareness, it's time to address the elephant in the room: the financial burden. Esther O'Brien, a money coach, is adamant I should not be footing the bill if my children are earning. 'The lesson they need to learn is that living expenses do not come for free,' she says. 'Society has changed and children are staying home for longer, but it does not mean that they are your financial responsibility for ever. It's about what each family can manage, and having a conversation.'

To figure out how my personality influences my handling of the situation, she wants to determine my 'money type'. She asks me to take a quiz by The Money Coaching Institute – and the results are no surprise. 'The quiz reveals that you are an "innocent", a "victim", an "artist", and a "martyr" when it comes to money,' she says. There's the martyr again. 'The innocent is naive, feels powerless and likes to leave everything to others. The victim is stuck in the past, blaming everybody else rather than taking responsibility. They may seek to be rescued and can live out a self-fulfilling prophecy. The artist is non-materialistic and spiritual, and would prefer not to think about money,' she explains. 'Martyrs rescue people and put others' needs before their own, then resent it.' I know this much is true. But she adds: 'Remember that you are not these things – this is just behaviour that you display, and you can change it.'

O'Brien assures me that payment of board by employed children is not an old-fashioned concept. 'I understand your children may be saving for their own homes but they are living in yours and asking for a contribution is not outlandish,' she says. 'It would cost a lot more if they were living on their own!'

So how do I grasp the nettle? 'Arrange a family meeting,' she advises. 'Explain how much things cost and what you expect them to contribute. It could be a percentage of what they earn or an actual amount – but be very clear that you expect them to help out.'

She outlines a practical plan: 'Make a list of all the household expenses: food, council tax and utilities, then add it up. Do it properly. Do not guess, because food often catches people out. Explain that this is what it costs to run the house, but you are subsidising them and need them to share the load. Ask them what they feel is fair and have an idea of what you think is fair. You could also make a meal plan for the week together, whereby they could each pay for and make one meal or more, which will cut down your food bill,' she says.

'We identified that you have characteristics of innocent, victim, martyr and artist. You don't like confrontation, preferring to bury your head in the sand in the hope everything will be okay, but you must get on top of this to stop the simmering inside,' O'Brien concludes.

moneycoachinginstitute.com/money-type-quiz

Age IS JUST A number

LET'S EMBRACE LIFE WITH PASSION AND PURPOSE, AND FUTURE-PROOF OUR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING, WRITES **REBECCA FRANK**

Don't you just love how summer makes you feel more adventurous and optimistic? There's something about the warmer weather and longer days that allows our imagination to run free, and dreams and plans to bubble away in our minds. We might sleep under the stars, listen to live music in fields, travel to new places, wear different clothes, and cook outside. Wouldn't it be great to hang onto that feeling of possibility and positivity beyond the holidays? To keep the spirit of summer going, with its can-do and anything-goes attitude?

Life can feel very serious sometimes and it's not always an easy ride, but if we want to grow and flourish in midlife and beyond, we need to keep stimulating and challenging our minds and bodies. Writer Jane Gordon had always been one of life's optimists, in denial about ageing, until she had a car accident in her early 60s that forced her to flash-forward to the future. 'In the course of a single difficult day, I had gone from feeling immune to the ageing process to understanding exactly how my life could be in 10 or 20 years. How, I began to wonder, could I create a different future for myself? One in which I was mentally sharp and physically strong enough to remain independent into my 70s and 80s.'

In researching her book *How Not To Grow Old* (Orion, £9.99), Gordon embarked on a series of challenges to build and maintain her physical and mental strength, from ballroom dancing to learning the recorder. 'We've all met people in their 80s who are mentally sharp, physically capable, funny and fast,' she says. 'And I bet they'll all tell you that staying young in spirit is about having a positive outlook and a project.'

At a time when we're very likely to live into our 80s and 90s, we can make choices about how we want our life to be. How do you want your life to look? How do you want to feel? Whatever age you are now, it's time to stop worrying about getting old and concentrate your efforts on feeling the best you can, while taking steps to future-proof your mind and body. 'This isn't a quest to chase eternal youth, but to celebrate the joys of being 100 per cent pro- rather than *anti-*ageing,' says Gordon. You might not look the same as you once did, but those youthful feelings of wonder and opportunity are still well within reach – this summer and beyond.

AGE-PROOF YOUR MIND

1

Shake things up

Variety makes things fresh and interesting; it keeps your brain sharp and your body alive – part of the reason why we feel rejuvenated after a holiday is the break from routine. We're naturally creatures of habit, so doing things differently might take a bit of effort at first, but you'll soon feel the benefits. Whether it's swapping Wordle for a sudoku, choosing a different genre of book, taking up a hobby, learning a skill, or visiting somewhere new, these all require different ways of thinking, and build what neuroscientists call 'cognitive reserve'.

'Lifelong learning requires us to have a growth mindset, to "up-size" our knowledge of the world,' says health coach Susan Saunders. 'And it doesn't matter what we learn – it's the learning that makes the difference, firing up our curiosity and engaging our minds.' Many women decide that the best way to keep their minds feeling younger is to really change up their life and train for a new career. 'As humans, we are meant to grow, stretch, and expand,' says Francesca Kastelanides, director and founder of Beam Academy, which provides accredited teacher courses, and yoga and mindfulness classes for children. 'Learning a new skill or retraining for a different career can only be positive, and although it will most likely be challenging at times, if your reason why is strong enough, you will always reap the benefits.'

She explains that the most important thing is to tap into your core motivation: 'When embarking on a new journey, ask yourself what you hope to gain, why you want to make this move, and what you expect to get out of it at the end.

'Learning something new will not only improve your skillset but it will boost your wellbeing. Being physically and mentally active has undeniable health benefits. From a physical point of view, when you exercise your brain the mind reshapes itself, because the physical brain is malleable and can grow and change, like any muscle. But, mentally, a new skill also boosts confidence and empowers you, which automatically helps you override any fears you may have. And, of course, learning will open up new opportunities in life that will boost your happiness. And who doesn't want to be happier?'

2 Focus on the positive

Ever feel like you're in a perpetual cycle of worry, from the small things (Did I remember to reply to that email/pay that parking fine?) to the big questions (What do I want to do with the rest of my life, and why is it going so fast?)? It can sometimes feel like there's a filing cabinet of worries in our brains waiting for us to flick through the minute we try to relax or, heaven forbid, get a good night's sleep. It's not surprising that many of us feel more stressed and worried as we get older. Aside from the day-to-day concerns, the whole concept of ageing can feel negative if you don't push back from the messages that getting older is something to disguise or resist.

'Rather than focusing on what we're going to lose, we should be aiming to break free from the culture of perfectionism we've grown up in, learning that staying young isn't about smoothing over wrinkles but focusing on the new superpowers that come with midlife,' says Sharon Blackie, author of *Hagitude: Reimagining The Second Half Of Life* (September Publishing, £16.99). By focusing on the positives of whatever age we are, rather than the negatives or worrying about what's to come, Blackie says we can find a new sense of freedom. As we reach midlife, she explains, 'we're more able to step back and see the bigger picture; we're better at assessing priorities, concentrating on what really matters. Ultimately, it's about fully embodying who you are, rather than trying to be something you're not.'

> "Staying young isn't about smoothing over wrinkles, but focusing on the new superpowers that come with midlife"

3

Keep brain fit

We know how to build and strengthen muscles in the gym, but it's equally important to pay attention to brain fitness. 'We want our brain to be "plastic" – that means flexible and able to grow,' says Susan Saunders. She recommends paying more attention to the brain, thinking about its structure and your ability to keep it growing. 'If we give it good quality inputs, we create neuroplasticity,' she explains.

One of things many people worry about as they get older is memory function – struggling to find words or remember names can begin happening in our mid to late 40s, when hormones start to fluctuate. Jane Gordon found that learning how to concentrate again by doing things that require total focus noticeably improved her memory. 'A lot of people, myself included, fear they may be experiencing early dementia, but I think it's more often about forgetting how to focus than memory.'

Gordon took a series of tests before and after she'd embarked on the challenges for her book, and these showed a significant improvement in verbal memory, which she attributes to being forced to concentrate on unfamiliar tasks while learning new skills, from life drawing to learning an instrument.

As well as applying our brain to new challenges, we can strengthen and enhance our brains with good nutrition, regular exercise, stress reduction, and sleep. This is important whatever lifestage we're in, because building a positive reserve now will help protect you against problems such as dementia when you get older. A healthy brain is also linked with good emotional health. 'Mental illness is associated with changes in the brain's structure and function, so looking after our brains will help promote good mental health. Studies of older people have linked greater mental wellbeing to better cognitive health, and reduced risks of dementia in later life,' says Saunders.

4

Get out more

When it comes to feeling good, other people are some of the most powerful tools we have. ‘The strength and breadth of your social connectedness plays a role in your “healthspan” (the number of healthy years we have, as opposed to total life span),’ says Susan Saunders. ‘Research shows that those with strong social bonds were half as likely to die, or develop dementia, as those with a weaker social network.’ Maintaining relationships by talking, listening, laughing and sharing experiences with like-minded people is as important for your health and happiness as popping vitamins or going to the gym.

Saunders advises taking an objective view of your support systems. ‘Do you have someone you can call on if you’re ill, having a financial crisis, or just fancy a chat?’ she says. If not, it might be time to expand your tribe – which isn’t as daunting a prospect as you might think. Socialising doesn’t have to mean going to big parties full of strangers, if that’s not your thing (and, let’s face it, for most of us it isn’t!). You can meet new people who share your interests by joining a book club or a creative class, or doing some volunteering – all great ways to connect.

And don’t think that just because you haven’t been in touch with someone for a while that it’s too late to reconnect with them. Receiving a phone call or text message out of the blue from an old friend would probably make someone’s day, so why not give it a go?

5

Find your purpose

It’s common to feel a lack of purpose as we get older, particularly for women, who have often given more of their time and energies to raising children. Yet all the evidence suggests that having a purpose, whether it’s through our work or other projects, is a hugely important factor for our wellbeing.

‘Research shows that having a purpose in midlife and beyond keeps us healthier for longer, gives us a better stress response, dampens inflammation, and protects both our cognition and our hearts,’ says Saunders. It also shifts our focus and attention from the fact that we’re not getting any younger. ‘For a lot of older people, their project becomes their health, which is a downward spiral,’ says Jane Gordon. ‘Once you think you’re declining, you will.’

If you don’t really know what your purpose is or might become, Saunders advises focusing on the principles that are important to you, and nurturing the things that excite you. ‘A purpose usually involves other people and gives you the sense of being part of something bigger,’ she says. ‘Ask yourself what you value and what you want your life to be like in five, 10, 15 years from now. The answers to these questions will shape your purpose.’

“A purpose in midlife and beyond keeps us healthier for longer”

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF PHYSICALLY WILL HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON HOW YOU FEEL, AS WELL AS HOW YOU LOOK. AS YOU REACH MIDLIFE AND BEYOND, IT'S TIME TO FOCUS ON GETTING STRONGER, FEELING SEXIER AND PRIORITISING SELF-CARE – WHAT'S NOT TO LOVE ABOUT THAT?

Stronger

If you want to look and feel your best as you age, then you'll need to exercise, and increasingly experts are recommending strength training (lifting weights) to hold off muscle mass loss and protect your bones. Celebrity trainer Matt Roberts explains: 'As we get older, we lose pounds of muscle every decade. We need to reverse this trend in order to stave off the conditions that occur when we lose fitness due to a lack of ability to exercise. In short, we need to give our body the chance to fight, because it will and it does!' To prevent and reverse muscle loss, Roberts recommends lifting heavy weights but, importantly, aim for strength, not size. He refers to research showing that lifting heavy items regularly slows down the ageing process by altering DNA strands and increasing the length of telomeres, part of our chromosomes that are vital to our wellbeing. So, in effect, we become genetically younger.

As part of her research for her book, Jane Gordon – a self-confessed 'gym virgin' – embarked on a routine of strength training and boxing to improve her balance, core strength, posture and proprioception (body awareness). Surprised by how much she took to boxing, she was encouraged to learn it has a physical and mental aspect – as well as testing your power, you're using your memory remembering the different moves. 'It definitely helped with my coordination and reaction times, helping me to focus and boost my memory,' says Gordon. After four months, she was 'beginning to understand why people get addicted to exercise' due to the positive feelings she was experiencing after every session and her increased energy and confidence. Her final tests revealed that she'd not only increased her muscle and bone mass but reduced her visceral fat (the fat that builds up around your organs) and her 'machine age', which dropped from 56 to 48 (she's in her mid 60s). 'This is the best news of all, as it's proof positive that the challenge has worked.'

If you're going to start a new strength-training routine, it's best to join a class or a gym where you can be guided to use the weights in a way that will challenge you without injury. Or buy some dumbbells and do home workouts – just take it slowly, and think about your form before gradually increasing the weight.

Sexier

Studies show there are real health benefits to be had from an active sex life, from lowering blood pressure and toning the pelvic floor, to improving sleep. The good news for single people is that you can get many of the benefits without having to involve anyone else. When a woman orgasms, oxytocin is released, which relieves tension, making you feel more relaxed – no surprise, then, that 39 per cent of women said they masturbate at night to help them fall asleep. Orgasm can also stimulate the brain by increasing blood flow, allowing nutrients and oxygenation to get there too.

Having sex might also make you look younger – research from the Royal Edinburgh Hospital showed that those who looked up to seven years younger than their age claimed to have around 50 per cent more sex than the average person.

If you're married or in a long-term relationship, keeping the spark alive can be a challenge, especially if you're not feeling in top shape physically. It's estimated that 50–80 per cent of women in midlife experience vaginal dryness due to declining oestrogen levels, which can make having sex painful. Added to that, one in three women have bladder leaks. If you're experiencing physical problems, it will undoubtedly have an emotional impact, too, but it's important not to suffer in silence. From many new and natural lubricants to hormone replacement and pelvic floor training, there's plenty that can be done to help you feel sexy again.

If the problem is more that you just don't feel like it, it can be a matter of scheduling sex like you would a hair appointment. In her book, *More Than A Woman* (Ebury £8.99), Caitlin Moran hilariously refers to midlife sex with her husband as a 'maintenance shag': 'I think everyone in a long-term relationship knows the feeling when it's been so long since you've done it that the whole concept seems like some madly improbable dream you once had,' she writes. 'But it's essential to keep the sexual spark going as a vital memory bridge to why you got together in the first place.' The truth is that the more you do it, the more you want it, and with this many proven benefits, it's got to be worth putting the effort in!

Self-care

We're not talking Botox and boob jobs here, but the simple youth-giving rituals and routines that will make you feel good in the now, whatever your age. When consulting make-up artist Ruby Hammer, Gordon learned that the more time you spend on skincare, the less you will need make-up. 'Creating a ritual of cleansing and nurturing your skin morning and evening won't just enhance your face, it will enhance your life,' says Hammer, who advises any woman who might be fretting over their reflection to look at themselves directly and objectively, and accept the changes that will inevitably have taken place. 'Then try to work out what works best for you now in a positive way that will be better for your face than Botox, surgery, or any other artificial ways in which women are persuaded to believe they will look younger.'

We all have a physical image of ourselves, which we may no longer match because we're inside our bodies and so don't notice as much. 'I still felt the same at 60 as I did at 40,' says Gordon. In some ways this is good, but it can also cause us to feel like we've lost contact with ourselves. Many women say a feeling of invisibility starts to creep in as they get older. And if you feel invisible, you'll *be* invisible. Sharon Blackie agrees that we have a choice about how to approach our life: 'We can see our final decades as a process of decline, or as a time of fruition. There can be a certain perverse pleasure, as well as a sense of rightness and beauty, in insisting on flowering just when the world expects you to become quiet and diminish.'

Being mindful about what we eat will also have an huge impact on our brain health and the way we look and feel. 'Our brains make up three per cent of our body mass by volume, but use 20 per cent of the energy we consume. Think about that for a moment – one fifth of everything we eat and drink is fuelling our brain,' says Susan Saunders. 'We can all feel the difference that eating well has on our mental wellbeing. Our brains love polyphenols from leafy greens, brightly coloured veg and berries, fatty acids EPA and DHA from oily fish, monosaturated fats from olive oil, nuts and avocados, clean protein sources, such as lean chicken, beans and pulses, and plenty of fibre,' adds Saunders.

A characteristic of youth is putting yourself first (often to a fault), but it's a skill well worth re-learning if you want to flourish in midlife and beyond.

The friends you need

THEY PROVIDE A SHOULDER TO CRY ON, AN EAR TO BEND AND A COMPANION TO BELLY LAUGH WITH. FOSTERING YOUR FRIENDSHIPS MIGHT JUST BE THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR HEALTH AND HAPPINESS, WRITES REBECCA FRANK...

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK, GETTY IMAGES

If you think back to a time in your life when you felt your most happy, energised and optimistic, the chances are it would be a time when your friendships were positive and plentiful. There's nothing quite like the company of good friends to lift your spirits, help put things in perspective, and make you laugh out loud. Our friends aren't just good for a giggle, however; they're vital for our health, with research showing that people with positive friendships live longer and healthier lives.

The extent to which friendship influences our wellbeing is evidenced in studies of people living in Blue Zones – areas of the world where a higher number of people live much longer than average. Johann Hari, author of *Lost Connections* (Bloomsbury, £10.99), explains: 'All the evidence shows that the longest lives are the happiest lives, and the most dependable thing you can do to boost happiness and add length to your life is to have a close circle of friends. These are people you can talk to, share values and interests with, and keep each other's minds challenged.'

As much as we need them to function well and survive, however, friendships aren't always easy to navigate. From playground politics to standing at the school gates or setting up life in a new city, there are times in our lives when we all experience loneliness due to a lack of close connections. Cheryl Rickman, a positive psychology practitioner and the author of *Navigating Loneliness* (Welbeck, £9.99), explains how loneliness can be a chronic feeling, 'like a hum of discontent', or a milder, uncomfortable, but more transient feeling, like when you have FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), which is soothed once you feel included again. 'Fundamentally, loneliness is the cognitive discrepancy between our desired and actual social contact; the difference between the quality of relationships we have and the quality of relationships we wish we had (and need to have, so we may function well as humans).'

"There's nothing quite like the company of good friends to help put things in perspective"

While you might get hung up on how many friends you should have, the experts agree that it's not the quantity but the quality of those relationships that matters. The most important thing is that the friends you have make you feel heard and held, and having one friend that does this is better than several more superficial relationships.

Of course, all friendships aren't equal, and Rickman describes three main types of connection (inner, middle and outer circle), which correspond to the three types of loneliness: emotional (intimate), social (relational), and existential (collective). 'We don't need to have people in every circle,' Rickman explains, 'but having at least one person in our inner circle is important.' This inner circle includes the close confidantes with whom we share deep bonds of trust and mutual support – someone we can count on to call in the middle of the night for support, should we need it. 'Having a relationship network of five or more key confidantes – which can include romantic partners, best friends and perhaps family members – who we can rely on and whose relationship we cherish, means we are less likely to be lonely,' explains Rickman.

In the middle circle are the casual friendships or family relationships – people we see quite regularly, enjoy socialising with, make us laugh and can talk to, but don't tend to know on a deeper level. Then, in the outer circle are the weaker ties, with people such as colleagues and neighbours, fellow parents, or people we're in a group with. You might exchange small talk about less meaningful topics, but these are still important, comforting interactions. 'If you're experiencing loneliness, you can work on fostering all three types of connection, but prioritise the inner circle first,' advises Rickman.

Friendships change as we go through life, but the relationships in the inner circle tend to have had more time to take root, and are more likely to remain constant. It's possible to have good friends that you don't see very often, but those relationships should be strong enough to withstand periods of absence and change. 'Close friendships endure, but they take effort,' says psychologist Dr Audrey Tang. 'They require people staying in touch as lives diverge and change; they need to keep aligning, and to do that requires effort from both sides. Good friends are the relationships that result in emotional loneliness if we don't see them.'

If you're feeling lonely and disconnected, Dr Tang recommends picking up the phone and getting in touch with one of your friends who you trust and respect. 'We don't often deliberately

lose touch with people – we just don't always find the time – and if you're worried about not having been in touch, it's likely they feel just as guilty, so don't let that stop you.'

Sometimes we need to focus more on making new friends, which can be difficult and nerve-wracking. 'When it comes to meeting people, you can't wait around for others to come to you,' says Rickman. 'You have to be proactive and create interaction opportunities by finding groups of people with whom you can build on mutual affinities and interests.'

It can be helpful to practise some communication techniques, such as using eye contact, smiling, asking questions, listening, and responding accordingly. 'We all want to feel seen and heard, so listen to people when they talk to you, and respond well.' And don't dismiss those casual friendships that can really help to combat feelings of social loneliness. 'It might be that you're craving a deep friendship, but it will take time to develop that relationship, so don't place too high an expectation on others at the start of an acquaintance.'

You could also find connection and friendship by showing support and kindness to others. As well as leaving you with the 'giver's glow', performing acts of kindness can help root us in our community and give us a sense of belonging. Likewise, if you reach out and ask for help, you're giving someone the opportunity to make a difference and feel good, and it will make you feel better, too, because a problem shared really is a problem solved.

> "Friends should make you feel heard and held, and having one friend that does this is better than several more superficial relationships"

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Serve up the perfect paella

My love affair with *paella*

OMAR ALLIBHOY, CHEF AND AUTHOR OF *PAELLA: THE ORIGINAL ONE-PAN DISH*, SHARES HIS PASSION FOR THE SPANISH CLASSIC

My love for paella started at a very early age, at a small arrocería (paella restaurant) called Posada de San Miguel in the picturesque coastal village of Altea, in the region of Valencia. We were very lucky in that my grandparents owned an apartment in the nearby city of Benidorm, where we would spend at least a couple of holidays every year together with the entire family, nearly 20 of us. It was the most fun summer camp we could have dreamed of as children, and today still provides the most beautiful memories. Each August, we would celebrate my grandad's birthday at Posada de San Miguel. This was his restaurant of choice every year, and his favourite place to have his birthday paella, which quickly became a family tradition.

Since then, I would say that my relationship with paella has been eventful. I started cooking at a very young age but we never cooked paellas at home, as it's not a tradition in Madrid where I grew up. So every time we went east for the holidays, this famous dish felt exotic and special to me. It was rare to find a restaurant that could feed a large family like ours with just one pan – a pan that would come to the centre of the table for all of us to share – and paella was the perfect solution.

It was in Posada de San Miguel that I first asked if I could go into the kitchen 'to take a look', explaining that I loved cooking and I wanted to learn. As you can imagine, not many cute seven-year-old kids ask that question in restaurants, so out of the hundreds of places I asked over the years, I can only recall a couple of occasions when I was turned down. It was my thing – I loved good food, and going to restaurants was a real treat; a visit wouldn't be complete without me getting into their kitchen for a few minutes, to stand at the pass and watch, or be taught something by the burners (this was in the days before 'health and safety' fears!). It was fascinating. Even now, I still remember that kitchen to perfection, with long brick-built worktops in a U-shape, the walls of the rectangular kitchen wrapped with dozens of wood fires with paellas on top of them. It had an island in the middle where they would prepare the ingredients for each one. The fire from the logs of lemon and orange trees, as well as thinner branches from pruned vines, was so fierce that the flames would wrap around each paella pan to above its rim.

That was my introduction to paella, but I am an inquisitive person and have since probed other people about their paella memories. Over the years,

I've come to realise that anyone who has eaten a paella at least once in their life remembers it. It's quite remarkable. I think the most likely reason for this is the fond memories that often attach themselves to a paella. It certainly hasn't become Spain's national dish for no reason. For holiday-makers around the world who come to our shores, paella is the dish that is always served at the welcome galas and marks the beginning of their holidays. It's this powerful emotional connection that I personally believe makes paella so popular and well-loved by both Spaniards and all the people we welcome into our beloved country.

PAELLA IS A FIESTA

Across Spain, Sundays are when you gather with your loved ones. In the region of Valencia, however, this coming-together will centre around the cooking and eating of a paella. Meeting for paella means cooking it from scratch while everyone is there, as opposed to having the table set with the starters ready and the main dish in the oven, waiting for when your friends and family arrive. This is another key example of paella culture and what it exemplifies – bringing everyone together to take part in the paella preparation.

On a typical Sunday, the table might be set by one guest, while others prepare the salads, alioli and bread. Even the main event, the paella, isn't necessarily cooked by the host; it can be cooked by someone else and everyone generally helps with the making of it. Each person always has their own opinion on how best to make a paella!

Meeting for paella is a whole-day event. From the aperitivo – a drink served with a few snacks – to the preparation of the ingredients and the building of the fire, to setting the table, making some starters and cooking the actual paella, the day is filled with good food and good people. And even once we've finished eating, the day doesn't stop there – in a very Spanish manner we move on to what we call the sobremesa, the chat and laughter that can go on for so long that, before you know it, it's dinnertime.

Paella mixta

Meat and seafood paella

The best of both worlds! This is the most sold paella in my restaurants because customers get a bit of everything. It is rare to find such a combo in Valencia city, yet it is more popular in Alicante. This paella in particular was my grandfather's favourite

Serves: 4
Prep: 30 minutes
Cook: 45 minutes

- 2 litres shellfish stock (see right)
- 0.4g saffron
- 120ml extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 dried ñora pepper
- 2 tomatoes
- 4 large raw prawns, shells on
- 2 chicken legs, each cut into 2 pieces
- 200g squid, cleaned and cut into rings
- 6 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 tsp sweet smoked paprika
- 440g Spanish paella rice
- 200g mussels, cleaned and de-bearded
- Salt, to taste

1. Warm the shellfish stock in a saucepan and crumble in the saffron. Keep warm over the lowest heat.

2. Place a paella pan over low heat and add the olive oil and ñora pepper. Fry for 3 minutes, then remove from the oil and blend to a paste with the tomatoes using a blender or food processor; set aside for later. Increase the heat to medium, add the prawns, and cook on one side only for 2 minutes, then remove from the pan and set aside. Add the chicken pieces and fry for 10 minutes until golden on all sides. Finally, add the squid and sauté for about 5 minutes, or until golden in colour. Season with salt.

3. Add the garlic, closely followed by the paprika and the tomato and ñora pepper paste. Cook for about 2 minutes until the oil starts to separate from the tomato paste. Add the rice and stir all together for a couple of minutes, making sure the rice gets coated with the oil.

4. Carefully add the hot stock to the pan and give it a good stir to distribute the rice evenly, then taste the stock and adjust the seasoning if necessary. Cook over a high heat for 10 minutes, then reduce the heat to low and cook for a further 5 minutes, without stirring. Add the mussels and prawns, cooked side up, and cook for a final 4 minutes.

5. Let it rest off the heat for 5 minutes before serving and eating.

CALDO DE MARISCO (SHELLFISH STOCK)

Makes about 4.5 litres

- 500g langoustines
- 500g large shell-on prawns
- 3 tbsp light olive oil
- 3 bay leaves
- 1 whole head of garlic, cloves peeled
- 200g onion, roughly chopped
- 200g carrot, roughly chopped
- 200g leek, roughly chopped
- 150g celery, roughly chopped
- 1 tomato (optional)
- 1 tsp fennel seeds
- 1 sprig of rosemary
- 3 sprigs of flat-leaf parsley
- 1 shot of brandy
- 100ml white wine
- 5 litres water
- Pinch of black pepper

1. Firstly, remove the heads and shells from the langoustines and the prawns. Put the clean tails of the shellfish to good use (for example, by cooking a sensational shellfish paella!).

2. Heat the olive oil in a stockpot over a high heat and add the langoustine heads and shells. Fry for 3 minutes, then add the bay leaves, garlic and all the vegetables and fry for a further 10 minutes, stirring frequently.

3. Add the fennel seeds, rosemary and parsley. Pour in the brandy and allow it to reduce, then pour in the white wine. Let it reduce down completely then add the water. Bring to the boil, then skim away the froth that rises to the surface with a ladle. Reduce the heat to low, season with pepper and simmer with the lid on for 1 ½ hours.

4. Place a colander over a large bowl or a saucepan and carefully strain the stock, then strain again, this time through a sieve lined with muslin or cheesecloth. Transfer to an airtight container. You can keep it in the fridge for up to 5 days or in the freezer for up to 3 months.

Arroz de longaniza, cebolla roja y champiñones

Sausage, red onion and mushroom paella

There are flavours that quite simply belong together, and these three are a great example of one of those matches. The beauty of paella is that it works with pretty much every ingredient you can think of. As a kid, I never used to eat sausages except in hotdogs, but since I moved to the UK I have discovered just how good they are – even in a paella

Serves: 4
Prep: 20 minutes
Cook: 40 minutes

- 2 litres pork stock
- 0.4g saffron
- 120ml extra-virgin olive oil
- 400g pork sausages
- 2 red onions, cut into wedges
- 150g small mushrooms, whole
- 6 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 tsp sweet smoked paprika
- 1 tomato, grated
- 400g Spanish paella rice
- 175ml red wine
- A few sprigs of rosemary
- Salt and pepper, to taste

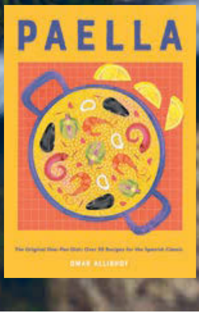
1. Heat the pork stock in a saucepan over a low heat and crumble in the saffron. Keep warm over a low setting.
2. Heat the olive oil in a paella pan over a high heat and add the sausages, red onion and mushrooms. Fry for 8 minutes until everything is nicely caramelised, then season with salt.
3. Add the garlic, closely followed by the paprika and grated tomato, and cook for about 2 minutes until the oil starts to separate from the tomato paste. Add the rice and stir together for another couple of minutes, making sure all the rice gets coated with the oil. Pour in the red wine and let it bubble for a couple of minutes until it has reduced down.
4. Carefully add the hot stock to the pan and give it a good stir to distribute the rice evenly. Season with pepper and add the sprigs of rosemary. Taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary, then cook over a high heat for 10 minutes before reducing the heat to low and cooking for a further 9 minutes, without stirring. Let it rest off the heat for 5 minutes before eating.

CALDO DE CARNE (MEAT STOCK)

Makes about 3 litres

- 2 Spanish onions, cut into wedges
- 1 leek, cut into chunks
- 4 carrots, cut into chunks
- 3 celery sticks, cut into chunks
- 1 tomato, quartered
- 10 garlic cloves, unpeeled
- Drizzle of olive oil
- 2kg beef, pork, lamb or game bones, cut widthways
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 clove
- 10 black peppercorns
- Pinch of salt
- 5 sprigs of tarragon
- 2 sprigs of rosemary
- 175ml red wine
- 5 litres water

1. Preheat the oven to 210°C/410°F/gas mark 7. Put the onion, leek, carrots, celery, tomato quarters and garlic cloves into a large roasting pan and drizzle with olive oil. Spread out the bones in a separate roasting pan. Put both pans in the oven and roast for about 1 hour, or until dark brown, tossing halfway through.
2. Transfer all the ingredients from both pans to a large stockpot, then put the empty pans over a high heat and deglaze with a splash of water, scraping up all the charred bits with a metal spoon. Pour into the stockpot.
3. Add all the remaining ingredients to the stockpot and bring to the boil over a high heat, then reduce the heat and simmer with a lid on for about 4 hours.
4. Strain the stock into a clean container. Once cool, you can keep it in the fridge for up to 5 days or in the freezer for up to 3 months. Some fat will float to the top of the stock once it is cool – you can remove this easily with a spoon.


PAELLA
The Original One-Pan Dish: Over 50 Recipes for the Spanish Classic
OMAR ALLIBHOY

Paella The Original One-Pan Dish: Over 50 Recipes For The Spanish Classic by Omar Allibhoy (Quadrille, £18) is out now

Arroz a la inglesa

The lazy paella

After living in the UK for 18 years, I've learned that the British want quick and easy solutions for dinner. This recipe is a super-easy midweek recipe, as the star ingredients come directly from your supermarket in easy-to-manage pieces, meaning minimal prep! Some purists would say that the use of chorizo in this recipe is controversial, but sometimes you just need to work smarter, not harder

Serves: 4
Prep: 5 minutes
Cook: 40 minutes

- 1.5 litres chicken stock
- 0.3g saffron
- 100ml extra-virgin olive oil
- 500g chicken wings
- 150g mini chorizo sausages
- 100g mangetout
- 4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp sweet smoked paprika
- 1 large tomato, grated
- 400g Spanish paella rice
- Salt, to taste

1. Heat the chicken stock in a saucepan over the lowest heat and crumble in the saffron. Keep warm over the lowest heat.

2. Heat the olive oil in a paella pan over a high heat and add the chicken wings. Fry for 5 minutes, then add the chorizo and fry for a further 5 minutes, or until golden in colour. Season with salt.

3. Add the mangetout and garlic, closely followed by the sweet smoked paprika and the grated tomato, and cook for about 2 minutes until the oil starts to separate from the tomato paste. Add the rice and stir all together for a couple of minutes, making sure the rice gets coated with the oil and sears.

4. Carefully add the hot stock to the pan and give it a good stir to distribute the rice evenly. Taste the stock and adjust the seasoning if necessary. Cook over a high heat for 10 minutes, then give it a good shake to flatten the paella, and continue cooking over a low heat for the next 8 minutes, without stirring. Let it rest off the heat for 5 minutes before eating it.

A kitchen for all seasons

THE OUTDOOR KITCHEN HAS COME A LONG WAY FROM THE DAYS OF BRICK-BUILT BARBECUES, SAYS INTERIORS WRITER **CAROL BURNS**

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Once hidden away in the bowels of the house, the kitchen has long since become the hub of the home – so it was only a matter of time before we decided one was not enough and moved the party outside.

Nowadays, outdoor kitchens – from a kettle barbecue to a wood-fired pizza oven – can be just as luxurious as the one inside (and sometimes more so – most households would struggle to fit a tandoori oven next to an AGA *inside* the house!).

So how do a few mismatched outdoor cooking appliances earn the name 'kitchen'? The key element is the work surface. There's no official ruling, but for me a prep space turns a cooking station into an actual room. Organise it properly and introduce a dining table nearby, and you may never go back indoors (except to get more wine; I don't advise installing a fridge in your new outdoor kitchen, unless you're paying for a professional installation. In which case, throw everything – including the kitchen sink – at it!).

Like the best kitchen layout, the outdoor kitchen needs some fairly careful planning. Hot days are made for barbecuing, tandooriing, or pizza ovening. But spare a thought for the chef. While the diners bathe in the glories of summer sunshine, sipping chilled Chardonnay and chatting, the cook is likely having a much stickier time (and I'm not talking about the marinade).

This is where good placement comes in. Wheel the barbecue out of the way and really look at your garden, visualising the best places for your kitchen. This will come down in part to the space you have and the safe flat surfaces on offer. But somewhere that leans towards shade in the afternoons and evenings would be ideal.

Place your dining space nearby so the chef feels part of the party, and supply a chair where they can survey their territory. Think bar stool rather than sun lounger: you don't want those burgers to burn while chef is relaxing a little *too* much!

Before moving up to the outdoor kitchens that cost more than your indoor one, it's worth spending a summer finding out if you like cooking outside, so start simple. Your prep surface should sit next to the cooking station; if you are right-handed, it will be on your left. It might be an old kitchen table, bar, or something purpose-built.

Personally, I find the kitchen trollies on wheels you can get from places such as Ikea just perfect – not least because they can be rolled back into the garage to protect them from inclement weather. They are generally at the right height, with adjustable legs and lockable wheels. They also come with shelves for storing a few cooking implements or fuel accoutrements.

If this is your first season of outdoor cooking, you might want to try a fold-down wallpaper pasting table with extendable legs. Another cheap way to create an outdoor kitchen is using bricks and scaffolding boards – but that's a more complicated DIY job for another season.

Undoubtedly, the barbecue is the main feature of any outdoor kitchen, so it's worth making the investment. Today's gas-fired barbecues come with ring burners and separate grills to turn your basic burger selection into a smorgasbord of marinated meats, grilled vegetables and fish, and toasted breads. So if you are buying something new, consider upgrading to something with more than your classic kettle (and turn your old kettle base into a patio-warming fire pit).

There are many other cooking options on offer for your outdoor space – for me the answer is to add an item each year and develop your collection. After a barbecue the pizza oven is my next favourite appliance. These can be gas-fired, or simply use a wood burner. The former is faster to use, while many purists would say the latter is the only true pizza oven.

However sumptuous or simple your outdoor kitchen space, it will be added to by a few herb pots. Handy for pulling off to tear into your marinade or straight onto that grilled rainbow trout, a kitchen is not complete without some fresh parsley, rosemary, thyme and chives. Throw in some mint and coriander and you've got yourself an outdoor kitchen fit for all menus.

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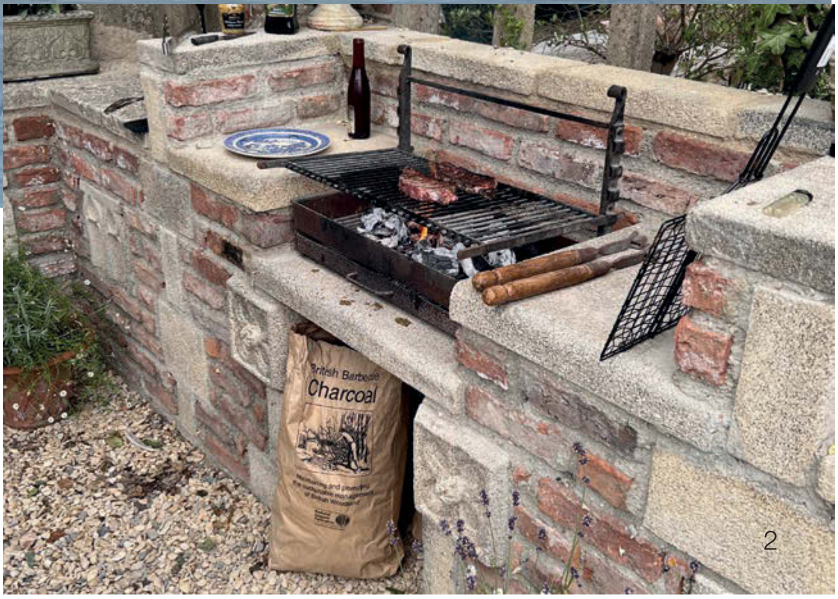

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> “Before moving on to outdoor kitchens that cost more than your indoor one, it’s worth spending a summer finding out if you like cooking outside, so start simple”

1 Grillo Vantage outdoor kitchen, £9,975, grilloliving.com
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Food philosophy

PURE, SEASONAL INGREDIENTS AND MINDFUL PREPARATION FORM THE BASIS OF NANCY SINGLETON HACHISU'S ELEGANT, FLAVORSOME DISHES, IN *JAPAN: THE VEGETARIAN COOKBOOK*

Fried okra with tomato sauce

(Age-okura to tomato no marine)

'Summer-grown okra and tomatoes go together well. Here, the fresh tomato sauce is intentionally light to balance the fried element of the okra'

Serves: 4

- 5 medium tomatoes
- 2 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 5 large capers, finely chopped
- 2 small Japanese green olives or Picholine, pitted and finely chopped
- 1 tbsp olive brine (from the jar of olives)
- 1 green shiso leaf, finely chopped
- Neutral oil, such as rapeseed, for deep-frying
- 200g okra, brown portions of tops pared off
- 1 tbsp potato starch

1. Finely dice 2 of the tomatoes and scrape into a bowl. Stir in the vinegar, olive oil, capers, olives, olive brine, and shiso. Refrigerate to chill.

2. Slice the remaining 3 tomatoes into rounds 1cm thick and sprinkle with ¼ tsp salt. Heat a large well-seasoned cast-iron skillet or non-stick frying pan over medium-high heat. Place the tomatoes in the pan in one layer and sear for about 2 minutes on each side to caramelise. Line a dinner plate with overlapping layers of the tomatoes. Once cooled, refrigerate to chill.

3. In a high-sided sauté pan, heat 3cm oil over medium-low heat until you can feel heat rise from the pan. The oil temperature should be lower than normal frying temperature, about 160°C.

4. Arrange the okra horizontally to you on a cutting board and sprinkle with ½ tsp salt. Roll the okra in the salt with your flattened palms to break down the fibres a little. Wipe off the salt and any moisture with a paper towel, and halve the okra lengthwise. Dust lightly with the potato starch, shake off, and slip into the oil. Fry, turning, for about 1 minute. Drain briefly on a rack set over a pan to catch the drips. Once cool, refrigerate to chill.

5. Once chilled, divide the tomato among four salad plates to one side so they are overlapping slightly. Arrange the okra in the middle of the plates or stack them in the centre so the okra tops are laying across the bottom of the tomato slices. Sprinkle evenly with ¼ tsp salt. Spoon the tomato sauce over the okra, allowing the okra to peek through. Or mound the tomato sauce over some of the bottoms of the stacked okra at the opposite side of the plate from the tomato slices. Serve as a light side course.

Ume miso-sautéed summer vegetables

(Natsu yasai no ume miso itame)

'Choose a full-flavoured miso of your choice (not white miso). Miso is a natural match for aubergine and peppers, and these miso stir-fries – colloquially 'abura miso' – are served often in the Japanese countryside during the summer'

Serves: 4

- 3 small aubergines
- ½ medium courgette
- 1 large red bell pepper
- 10 slender green beans
- 1½ tbsp lightly roasted gold sesame oil
- ½ tbsp fine slivers fresh ginger
- 5 tbsp sake
- 4 tbsp miso
- 1 tbsp gold sesame seeds, warmed in a dry frying pan until fragrant

1. Slice off the ends of the aubergines and courgette and discard. Halve them lengthwise, then cut crosswise into 1cm pieces. Soak the aubergine in cold water to keep it from discolouring. Core and seed the pepper and cut into 2cm irregular pieces.

2. Bring a medium saucepan three-quarters full of water and 1 tsp salt to a boil over high heat. Add the green beans and cook until their green colour just brightens, 1–3 minutes, depending on thickness. Trim off the stem ends and cut the beans crosswise into 2cm pieces. Set aside.

3. Drain the aubergine and blot dry. In a large frying pan, warm 1 tbsp of the oil over low heat. Add the ginger, stir once to coat with oil, then add the aubergine, courgette, and bell pepper. Increase the heat to high, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until lightly browned in spots, 2–3 minutes.

4. Stir in the remaining oil and the sake, and toss well. Add the miso and stir-fry to coat evenly. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook until the vegetables are softened, 2–3 minutes longer. Fold in the green beans and sesame seeds and serve hot or at room temperature. Keeps for 2 or 3 days, if refrigerated.

Sweet potato croquettes
(Satsuma-imo korokke)

'The unusual additional ingredients in these croquettes make them extra special and extra tasty. Substitute the eggs with finely grated mountain yam for a vegan version'

Serves: 4

- 2 medium sweet potatoes, peeled
- 1 small ear corn
- ½ tbsp unroasted sesame oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 small carrot, diced
- 4 tbsp coarsely chopped cooked edamame or green peas
- 2 tbsp plain flour
- 2 eggs, at room temperature
- 60g organic panko
- Neutral oil, such as rapeseed, for deep-frying
- 1 lemon, cut into small wedges

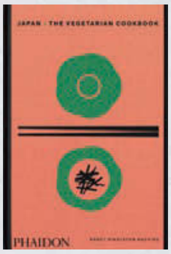
1. Place the peeled sweet potatoes in a bamboo or metal steamer and cook over a pot of rapidly boiling water until completely soft in the centre, about 25 minutes. Mash while still hot.

2. Fill a small pot with water and bring to a boil. Remove from the heat and dunk in the corn for 30 seconds. Allow the corn to cool to room temperature before cutting the kernels off the cob with a razor-sharp knife. In a large frying pan, warm the sesame oil over a medium heat. Add the diced onion and carrot and cook, stirring, until softened but not coloured, 3–5 minutes. Scrape the sautéed onion and carrot into the bowl with the mashed sweet potato and fold in with the corn kernels, edamame, 1 tsp flaky sea salt, and ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper. Form eight small but fat rounded cylinders and roll them in the flour, making sure that all surfaces have been dusted. Shake off excess.

3. In a shallow bowl, whisk the eggs until homogenous. Make a mound of panko on one side of a clean baking sheet. Working one by one, dip each croquette into the egg, allowing excess to drip off, and roll in the panko to coat evenly. Line up on the opposite side of the baking sheet from the panko side. Add panko as needed.

4. In a large high-sided sauté pan, heat 3cm oil over medium heat until about 170°C. To check the oil temperature, sprinkle a few pinches of panko into the oil. The panko should sink to the bottom of the pan, then immediately float back up to the surface, and there will be a few medium-sized bubbles.

5. Slip the croquettes into the oil, taking care it does not overflow, and fry until golden on all sides, 3–5 minutes. Drain briefly on a rack set over a pan to catch the drips. Serve hot with a lemon wedge.



Japan: The Vegetarian Cookbook by Nancy Singleton Hachisu (Phaidon, £39.95) is out now. Photography by Aya Brackett

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Diamond Bathtub and Pedestal Sink, £POA, maisonvalentina.net

Bathed in glory

ONCE REGARDED AS A PURELY FUNCTIONAL – AND LARGELY FORGOTTEN – SPACE, THE BATHROOM HAS UNDERGONE A DRAMATIC TRANSFORMATION IN OUR HOMES, BECOMING A KEY VALUE-ADDER, WRITES INTERIORS COLUMNIST CAROL BURNS

Beginning life as little more than a pot and a bowl of water, we can't get enough of bathrooms today. New and revamped homes now often boast more loos than bedrooms! So, with so many options available, what can you do to really make a, ahem, splash?

THE PRINCIPAL SUITE

Attached to the main bedroom, open-plan bathing has become a popular choice in this lavish add-on – if you're lucky enough to live in a remote, rural location (or, indeed, a swanky, sky-high penthouse, make the most of unrivalled privacy and those priceless views, and enjoy them from the comfort of your bath).

The bathroom has always been a place of innovation: walk-in showers and the wet-room concept have their

Peachy Petals Floral Wall Mural, from £37 per sq m, wallsauce.com

Metallic Koi III Tropical Fish Wallpaper, from £33 per sq m, wallsauce.com

Invincible Floor-Mounted Manual Bath/Shower Mixer in Living Brass, £POA, swadlingbrassware.co.uk

Bentley The Bengal Tiger weatherproof print by YardArt UK, £450, theoutsidelivingroom.com

origins in creating accessible bathing. The double sink, however, was designed for marital harmony!

Colour schemes in the principal suite should be palatial. Forget the white and griege, and add gold mosaic tiling, under-cabinet LED lighting, and multiple mirrors. Set off darker wall colours with as many tropical plants and candles as you can reasonably fit. Storage is important, but displaying all those designer bubble baths and oils is half the fun of having them. Bin the dated nautical accessories, though, unless it's a timeless porthole mirror or a storm lamp.

THE FAMILY BATHROOM

A great all-rounder, the family bathroom is the main event. As its name suggests, this room needs to multi-task. Always have a bath (estate agents will tell you, a lack of a bath will put off those buyers with small children yet to discover the joys of power-showering, not to mention those of us who love a good soak).

If space is an issue, a shower head over the bath doesn't have to look utilitarian – quality bathroom designers can offer something for everyone. Good lighting is important here, and while blue and green remain favourite bathroom shades, why not consider something darker and combine it with shuttered windows?

Inky Black Glass Bertie Bathroom Wall Lights, £249 each, glowlighting.co.uk

Opium Blush Teal wallpaper, £135 a roll, thecuriousdepartment.com

THE EN SUITE

A small add-on luxury for bedrooms where space is a premium, a spot of clever design can go a long way here. If you live far away from family and friends, a guest room is rarely unoccupied, so your en suite might get more traffic. Bring something of the bedroom design into the room through colour, and match the lighting. Don't get carried away with knick-knacks and keep it (mostly) decorative accessory-free.

THE CLOAKROOM

This tiny little nook of a room is a place to have some real fun. Rather than a simple lick of paint and perfunctory tiling, try out some of your wildest and wackiest design ideas here. If it doesn't work, it probably hasn't cost much, so simply start over!

Try pick-and-mix coloured and patterned tiles, ditch the white porcelain in favour of a splash of colour (avocado anyone?), and go really, really big with wallpaper design. Look out for designer end rolls and pick up a stylish bargain.

And, a final word: don't be afraid to add artwork to your bathrooms. Opt for a smattering of fused glass art, if you're worried about the steam.

Eau Zone Wet Room Panel in Matt Black, from £682.80, matki.co.uk

Reef Marine Blue Roller Blind, from £21.99, englishblinds.co.uk

Mud, glorious mud

FEELING CONNECTED WITH NATURE HAS BEEN PROVEN TO MAKE US HAPPIER AND HEALTHIER, AND ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO BOOST THAT CONNECTION IS TO GET YOUR HANDS (OR FEET) DIRTY. FROM GARDENING TO GROWING, FORAGING TO BUSHCRAFT, REBECCA FRANK EXPLORES HOW GETTING CLOSER TO THE EARTH CAN BOOST OUR WELLBEING, WHILE ALSO INTRODUCING US TO NEW SKILLS AND INCREASING OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE NATURAL WORLD

IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK

Gardener's glow

I confess, my gardening know-how extends little further than an appreciation of pretty flowers. However, if I can do something that will make me feel happier, learn something new and end up with some homegrown produce, I figure it's time to up my game and start growing.

It turns out the gardener's glow is about more than sunshine and physical activity (though they play an important role). The secret lies in the soil, and the serotonin-boosting bacteria it contains. Research shows that when we inhale the microbe M. vaccae from soil, it increases levels of happiness hormones in the same way as an antidepressant.

On the rare occasions I do planting, I always wear gloves, mainly because I can't be bothered to scrub my hands afterwards. However, with my serotonin levels in mind and a tray of seedlings in reach, I discard the gloves and use my hands to press the tiny plants into the earth. The soil is cold and wet, and there's no denying that going glove-free makes for a more sensory experience. After I've finished planting a bed full of seeds and seedlings, I'm tired but also relaxed, and though my nails are full of soil, it's strangely satisfying. Studies show the effect of the soil bacterium can last up to three weeks, so I figure a couple of hours in the garden is equivalent to a weekend yoga retreat – and a lot cheaper.

I water my plants first thing every morning with the backdrop of birdsong, and again in the early evening while decompressing after a day at work. It's satisfying to watch something growing slowly but surely, and I'm resisting the temptation to plant more and overcrowd my bed. Patience, it seems, is a gardener's secret weapon.

TRY THIS When it comes to growing, Helen Rook, author of *Urban Wild: 52 Ways To find Wildness On Your Doorstep* (Bloomsbury, £20), says to start by growing what you like to eat. And you don't need a veg bed – an outside pot will do. Try small varieties, such as dwarf cherry tomatoes, mini-courgettes or short carrots.

'If you prefer flowers, dwarf multi-stemmed sunflowers will provide cut flowers for the house, and dwarf nasturtiums brighten up any corner.' Whatever you choose to grow, make a point to notice them growing. 'Planting something and keeping it alive actually boosts your level of happiness,' says Rook.

Barefoot and carefree

If you're not into growing or gathering, you can reconnect with nature by simply taking off your shoes. Some experts say that walking barefoot ('earthing' or 'grounding', as it's also known) can reconnect you to the earth's subtle electric charge, which we have lost through spending most of our time in buildings, our feet squeezed into too-tight high heels. Evidence suggests that if we increase barefoot contact with the earth, it can help with chronic pain, boost immunity, improve sleep and reduce stress.

I take off my shoes in the garden and think about how rarely I do this. The feel of the grass underfoot reminds me of doing cartwheels and having constantly muddy feet as a child. I wiggle my toes, enjoying the waves of nostalgia. Rook suggests walking on different textures, such as soft moss and rough pebbles. 'It's not important whether you walk fast or slow, for ten metres or ten miles; it's about enjoyment not endurance. All that matters is that your feet are in contact with the ground.'

TRY THIS **Picnics are a great way to enjoy getting closer to nature and gather with friends and family, not least because you don't have to clear up the kitchen afterwards. So why not ditch the blanket, take off your shoes and enjoy the feeling of the grass on your skin? You could really channel your inner child by making a daisy chain or lying back and watching the clouds!**

Earth mother

When I first moved from London to Somerset, I was keen to immerse my kids in the natural world I felt we had been missing out on. We built dens, learned basic bushcraft skills, and toasted marshmallows over a campfire. I clearly remember all the kids crowding around the 'mud kitchen', where cakes and sandwiches were moulded from dirt and presented with grubby fingers and big smiles (who needs Play-Doh?). Now, many years on, we still spend a lot of time in the woods.

It's no coincidence that being among trees makes us feel better – essential oils (phytoncides) released by trees and plants have been shown in Japanese studies to reduce stress, depression and anger, as well as improving immune function. A common activity in Japan, this form of woodland aromatherapy, known as shinrin-yoku or forest bathing, is becoming increasingly popular around the world.

To really absorb the sounds, smells and sights of nature, you need to pause and switch on your senses. Next time I'm out walking the dog, I find a log in the woods, in a clearing where the sun filters through the tree canopy, and I sit a while. I spend a few minutes looking down at the forest floor and then up at the trees, touching the bark and picking some up from the ground. After a while, I hear children running towards me, gathering sticks to make dens, their hands and knees caked in dirt. I think to myself, it's no wonder they laugh around 300 times a day compared with adults' 15–30.

TRY THIS **Find yourself a sit-spot – somewhere you can sit or lie for a while amongst the trees in a wood or park or garden, and soak up your surroundings. Observe the sights and sounds in your immediate area. Who are you sharing this space with? Focus only on what is right here, right now.**

The joy of foraging

With escalating food costs, any produce we can grow at home or forage for is to be welcomed. Every spring, our woodland is carpeted in wild garlic, with its pungent green leaves that add flavour to risottos or stir-fries and make a delicious butter. Wild garlic is pretty easy to spot due to its strong scent, but if you're foraging for edible plants, it's always best to learn from an experienced guide. On a two-hour foraging walk, I discover how to pick nettles for making soup and bread without getting stung (a firm grip), and learn how to tell a poisonous hemlock from abundant cow parsley. I pick and nibble at lots of little leaves with different flavours and medicinal benefits. It's enjoyable to wander at a slower pace, pause and observe the hedgerows that I normally stride past. Studies show that the simple act of noticing nature is especially effective in unlocking the mental health benefits, and it's all there waiting to be discovered.

TRY THIS **Forage for edible flowers and berries to decorate cakes, salads and cocktails. Look out for mallow with its pretty purple flowers, meadowsweet (found near water), wild strawberries, wild rose, and nasturtium. For guidance, read *The Hedgerow Apothecary Forager's Handbook* by Christine Iverson (Octopus, £10.99), a month-by-month guide to foraging, with lots of ideas on how to make the most of your bounty.**

Alderney
CHANNEL ISLANDS

Just a stone's throw from the south coast of England lies the beautiful island of Alderney. With no crowds, no queues and no traffic jams our small island is often described as the 'hidden gem of the Channel Islands' and offers a warm, peaceful and relaxing escape for you to enjoy.

visitalderney.com

Away

BE AN ARMCHAIR EXPLORER
AND ESCAPE FROM REALITY WHATEVER
THE WEATHER, WITH DREAM
DESTINATIONS, PRACTICAL GUIDANCE,
AND THE BEST HOLIDAY BUYS

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Explore the UK coastline

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Calm your holiday tum

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Experience magical Morocco

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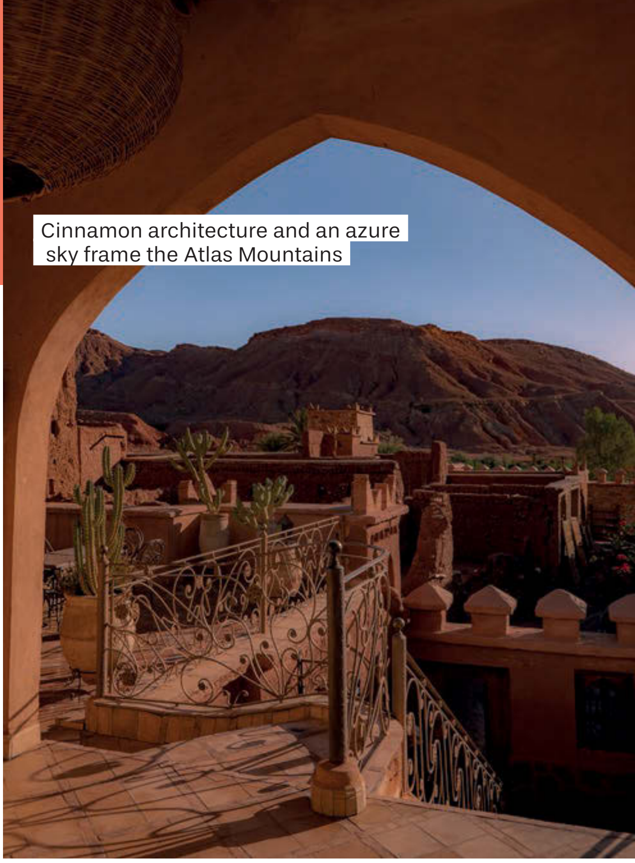
Adventure on foot


Cinnamon architecture and an azure sky frame the Atlas Mountains

AT A SCHOOL FOR UNDERPRIVILEGED GIRLS, IN INDUSTRIOUS DOMESTIC KITCHENS, AN ART STUDIO ALIVE WITH CREATION, AND A TEA ROOM IN THE SUN-BAKED LANES OF AN ANCIENT KASBAH, VEE SEY MEETS THE MOROCCAN WOMEN WHO SIMPLY CANNOT WAIT TO MEET YOU

Pay it forward

Sarah Chakin's young face glows with pride and gratitude as she shares her story, which is more inspirational than perhaps she realises to a westerner like me, who is familiar with a contrasting model of youth. Were it not for her hunger for knowledge and almost unattainable dream of a different life, Chakin would have undoubtedly followed the same path as her sister and been married at the age of 14, possibly to 'an old man', she says with a grimace, a multi-generational fingerprint of her High Atlas mountain world. Instead, the Amazigh girl from a remote village went to a school run by an independent charity, Education for All, and became an electrical engineer.

Chakin, pupils and volunteers at the school near Asni village welcome me excitedly with cascades of sweet mint tea, pastries speckled with lime-coloured pistachios, and animated introductions that leave me under no illusion that they take nothing for granted up here, where the air is thin and opportunities for women even more so. Under the wing of nurturing villagers employed as house mothers, they have found freedom, choice and confidence – in themselves and the future – in this land where East meets West and Sahara meets sea. And while divorce is rarely called a happy ending, Chakin's sibling, galvanised by her sister's bright future, split from her husband and went to school too.

JOURNEY WITH CARE

The travel industry may be changed for ever by the pandemic but, in its wake, our approach to holidays has hopefully evolved into a more conscious and less grasping beast – because there are responsible ways to see the world, and travel can be a potent force for good. I am part of an enthusiastic group chugging along in a minibus from the frantic and fragrant city of Marrakech to the imposing cinnamon-coloured citadel of Aït Benhaddou, via the settlements of Tahanaout and Ouirgane in the Toubkal National Park, where the silent power of nature and a slower way of life soothe the busy brain after the urban confusion. Our wonderful guide, Fouad Oulmyr, who is given to singing in falsetto at high volume en route, is a fount of knowledge and

> "They take nothing for granted up here, where the air is thin and opportunities for women even more so"

IMAGES: SHU LIN @DEJASHUU; VEE SEY;
CHECK GOVERNMENT ADVICE AND TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS BEFORE TRAVELLING TO MOROCCO

The rich, earthy landscape of Aït Benhaddou

Freedom and a new future await for Amazigh girls at Education for All

good humour. Shaking his head, he tells me that the term Berber, used for indigenous North African people, means barbarian and is derogatory, so I make a promise to write the more respectful and appropriate Amazigh.

We begin in the mellah – or Jewish quarter – of Marrakech, where we snake through labyrinthine streets and up a narrow stairway to foodie heaven. The best dining in Morocco, according to our guides, is provided by the home cook, and we are not disappointed. Our hostess, Zineb, who is too busy delivering steaming clay pots and serving us attentively to be pinned down for a full name, has the tiniest kitchen adjoining a comfortable dining room, which is also the family bedroom when guests depart. Zineb makes a living by feeding tourists and no one goes hungry in her humble home. It's astonishing what she produces with her daughter in their incy preparation area: I can't get enough of zaalouk, a blissful marriage of grilled aubergine and tomatoes; aromatic green bean, potato and carrot tagine with golden couscous; interesting salads of all colours, textures and complexities; and discs of khobz – Moroccan bread torn and dipped. Mmms fill the air, tea flows freely, and sticky cookies dripping with honey and stuffed with dates are abundant. After, we dance to tribal drumbeats made by a trio of riotous and guffawing women, and get our hands tattooed with an intricate henna pattern that I worry will stain my bedding at the Riad Nesma Suites & Spa.

A CLAIM TO PROGRESS

The magnificent ksar, or fortified village, of Aït Benhaddou, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and an outstanding example of Moroccan architecture, was once a heaving stop on the former caravan route from Marrakech to the Sahara. The backdrop for the films *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Gladiator*, cooks, growers, artisans and artists trade in the skinny streets that meander to the summit.

Past jaded, lazy-eyed camels, rich fabrics and tapestries, and musicians plucking tirelessly for pennies, we come to Tiwirga, the gallery of Hafida

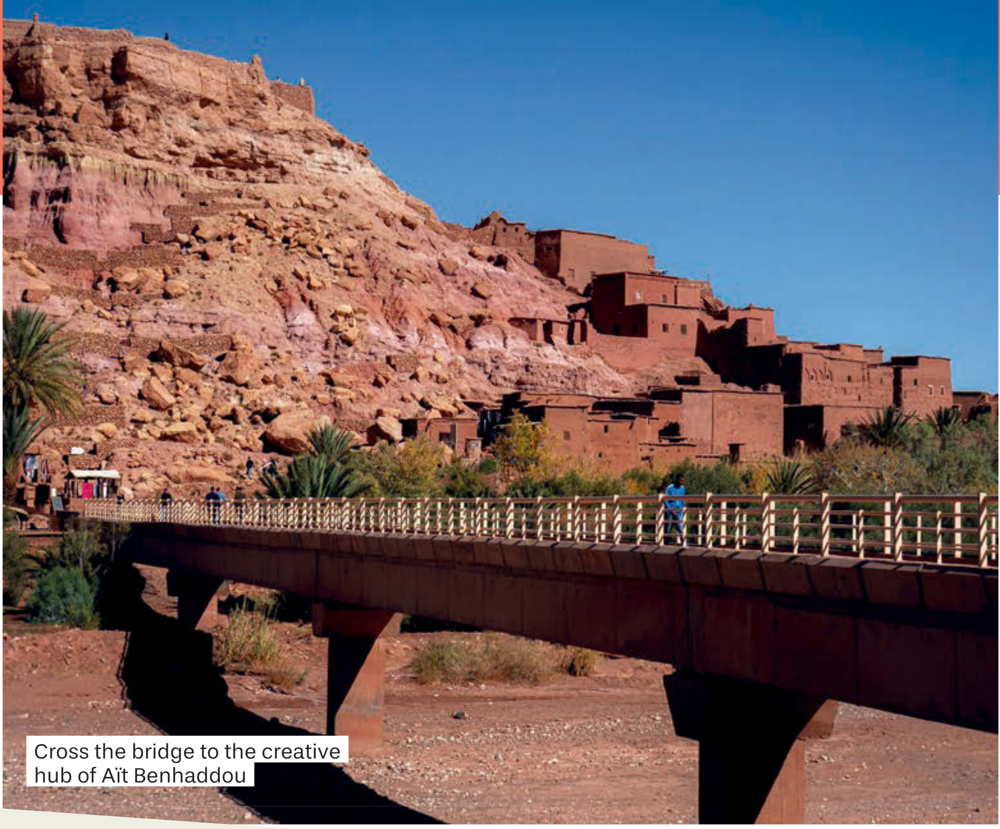
Zizi, an artist who works in the charming naïve style. Zizi's brother was the painter in the family, our translator tells us, and she did not believe in her talent until she was in her 30s and it could no longer be contained. The artist, with a kind, self-conscious smile and gentle aura, shows me her work and explains its meaning in her lyrical Amazigh tongue. The stone coolness of her studio houses warm images of Moroccan women going about their daily lives, never again to be left in the shadow of their menfolk.

At the Tawesna Salon De Thé (teahouse), run by the Women's Association of Aït Benhaddou, we have lunch with the charity worker and women's advocate Loubna Mouna, the co-founder of We Speak Citizen, the non-government organisation that backs the enterprise, and meet the women who work joyfully in its busy kitchen. Money made by the tea room is used for community projects and, crucially, Tawesna is where often isolated rural women find solidarity and friendship. 'This our place,' they say emphatically.

On the outskirts of the desert, we spend the evening drinking cocktails under bracing, black skies at the fashionable Hotel Riad Ksar Ighnda, and I wish I hadn't packed quite so lightly as I slope down to dinner in my dusty trainers.

There is time for reflection at our independently owned inn, Auberge Chez Momo II, and I stretch out my weary traveller's body practising yoga in a bit of a boot-camp style, thanks to our trendy Instagrammer yogi, who commands the terrace with his cap backwards like a grinning sergeant major. But this isn't just a terrace, it's one of the most breathtakingly glorious spots in the High Atlas, surrounded by leafy paths and lofty views that only a poet could do justice. Dinner is a tasty, authentic and musical affair, with a raucous band giving further insight into the lively culture of the Amazigh people. But I yearn for Mother Nature and retire early ahead of a dawn hike with our mountain-wise escort, who clambers over the earth, reddening to rich ochre, like a nimble goat, despite his years. Fluent in bushcraft and crossing rushing riverbeds on his tippy-toes, he identifies green oak, Aleppo pine, eucalyptus and juniper trees, and the hand of Fatima painted by his ancestors on doorways to protect us on our way. He explains that the original Chez Momo had to be relocated when a reservoir swallowed its predecessor!

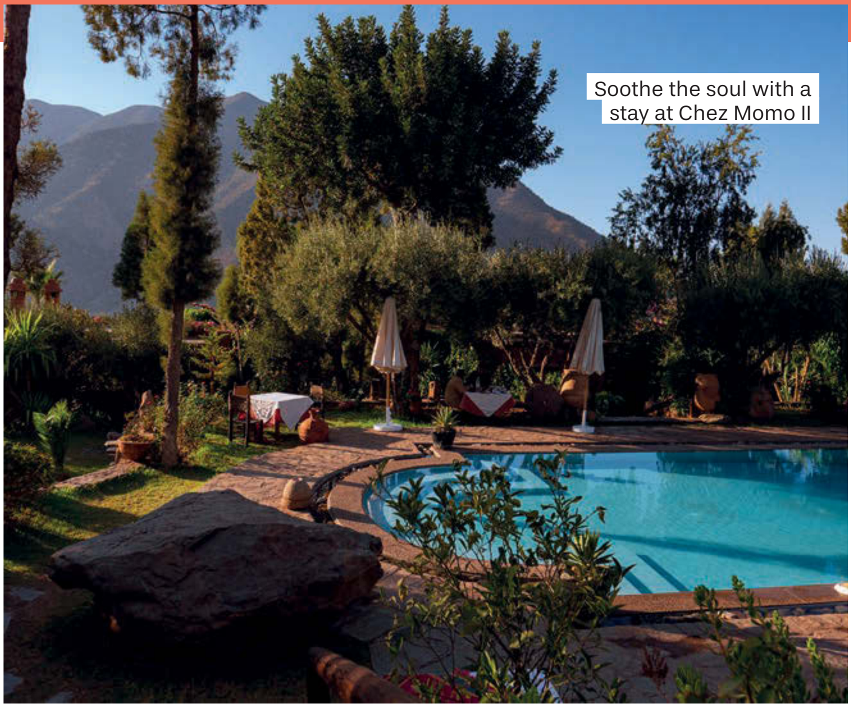
Leaving the highlands for the Atelier de Cuisine Chef Tarik cookery school, in a scented and sunny kitchen garden, we learn how to make the refreshing mint tea that anoints our every Moroccan social gathering. Royal tea, as it's known, is poured by the male elder of the household from an impressive height from pot to glass, to aerate the brew, aid infusion and show respect to the guest. Moroccan tea is green tea leaves infused with mint, thyme, lemon verbena, lemon geranium, marjoram and lemon grass, sweetened with countless cubes of that ubiquitous Amazigh staple, sugar. Calorie-rich sugar loaves have cultural importance in rural communities where food


Cross the bridge to the creative hub of Aït Benhaddou

Hafida Zizi's work is a celebration of sisterhood

Fuel the body and soul at the inspiring Tawesna teahouse

Tea is served alongside solidarity and friendship


Soothe the soul with a stay at Chez Momo II

is scarce, and if you're ever asking for a woman's hand in marriage here, be sure to present her papa with a few cones to sweeten your chances! A sugar-free royal tea is more acceptable these days, as people become more aware of the health implications, explains our teacher, the chef Youssef El Khadli, before he ushers us into his classroom kitchen to learn how to cook three types of tagine: chicken with olives and preserved lemons; vegetable; and lamb with caramelised onions and dried fruit.

I met many inspirational and strong women on this immersive and enriching trip, my first to this intoxicating country, but sometimes there is a soul that is waiting to touch yours more profoundly. Nora Fitzgerald, a social entrepreneur, is American born and was raised in Morocco, and her unwavering purpose is to empower women from disadvantaged backgrounds: widows, single mothers, orphans and former child maids. She founded the Amal Center (amal means hope in Arabic), which offers a culinary training programme so home cooks can use the skills that have been ingrained in them since childhood to improve their prospects. Eighty per cent of the centre's graduates are employed in the food industry and strive to find their way out of poverty. 'I knew I had to do something,' she explains, about establishing Amal in Marrakech in 2012, 'I could not go on in my life as it was while these women were living in such adversity.' Her determination and compassion speak to my sense of sisterhood and stir my hatred of inequality – which to my shame lies mostly latent – and I hope that one day I will do more than observe and record. I am honoured to be in the company of a woman who does not just want to make a difference, but does.

In my visit to Morocco I felt I was able to contribute in some small way to the work of such visionaries while satisfying my curious traveller's mind. And, as we all broaden our horizons now, it is a joy to hold the door ajar for those who are less fortunate.

Vee Sey travelled with Intrepid Travel on its Premium Morocco in Depth trip. Prices from £2,524 per person for 18 days, with accommodation, selected meals, activities, transport and the services of a local guide. All Intrepid trips are 100 per cent carbon offset and the not-for-profit Intrepid Foundation has raised £6 million for non-government organisations since its inception 20 years ago. Solo female travellers make up a large percentage of Intrepid travellers. intrepidtravel.com; theintrepidfoundation.org

5 enriching holidays

Spread your wings while supporting others...

1 **Egypt** Starting and ending in the capital, Cairo, see the pyramids of Giza and the tombs of pharaohs, sail down the Nile, visit the temples of Abu Simbel and share meals with host families. Explore the Valley of the Kings, Karnak temple and the city of Alexandria.

2 **Jordan** Discover sisterhood in this inspiring desert nation. Spend a night in Wadi Rum, learn the art of henna, float in the Dead Sea and visit Petra. Learn about traditional marriage from a professional matchmaker, and enjoy afternoon teas with local women.

3 **Greece** Uncover the mysteries of Greece and the Cyclades, tracing a path through ruins in Delphi, visiting secluded monasteries high in the Meteora valley, and watching the sun set over picturesque Santorini. Socialise with locals and enjoy fresh Aegean cuisine.

4 **Norway** Circumnavigate the largest island of the Svalbard archipelago, Spitsbergen, and look for Arctic wildlife in its natural habitat, including polar bears and Arctic foxes on this unique voyage. Wildlife is abundant in this stark marine environment, while there are also zodiac excursions on land.

5 **Turkey** Venture into the diverse heart of Turkey and immerse yourself in its culture. Discover dazzling islands and a sunken city on a cruise, then take a cooking class before joining a family feast. This trip includes tours of Gallipoli, Troy, Ephesus, Antalya and Cappadocia.
For more details and prices, visit intrepidtravel.com

Time for a NEW LOOK?

‘The white trainer is dead’ screamed the recent headlines. Could it be true – that wardrobe staple of the last decade, finally being relegated back to the tennis court? Our fashion expert, Gail Rolfe, promises us on page 16 that reports of the shoe’s demise have been greatly exaggerated. But if you fancy adding more colour to your wardrobe, or just want a lighter shoe now that summer is finally here, here is some of our favourite footwear right now…

Vespa Espadrilles,
£110, hobbs.com

Gola Grandslam
Trainers, £85,
oliverbonas.com

Moshulu x National
Trust Cork Footbed
Sandals, £69,
moshulu.co.uk

Forever Comfort
Leather Weave Driver
Shoes, £42, next.co.uk

Kiana Low Wedge
Heel Sandals, £69,
johnlewis.com

Red Stripe Platform
Sandals, £14.99,
tkmaxx.com

Loupe Slider Sandals,
£95, dunelondon.com

Orange Wedge
Shoes, £29.50,
marksandspencer.com

Crafted Hardware Mules,
£12.50, matalan.co.uk

Penelope Tile
Crochet Sliders,
£59, fatface.com

Mallie Two Part
Block Heel Mules,
£59.99, office.co.uk

Slip-On Casual Pumps,
£39, cottontraders.com

Take a walk on the wild side

THERE'S NO BETTER WAY TO IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE STUNNING SCENERY OF SOME OF EUROPE'S MUST-SEE DESTINATIONS THAN ON FOOT

Explore the Croatian coastline

WHAT: Hike Croatia Cruise
WHERE: Croatia
WHEN: Various dates in June and July 2023
PRICE: From £829 per person for two sharing for seven nights
VISIT: sail-croatia.com

Discover the best of the Croatian archipelago by boat and on foot with this seven-night cruise, calling at Solta, Vis, Vela Luka, Stari Grad, Bol, Makarska and Split. You can expect to enjoy daily hiking adventures along the coastline of Croatia, led by experienced hiking guides who are passionate about the local area. With a demanding yet rewarding itinerary, the routes are designed to challenge you physically and astound you visually. Staying on a premier ship, complete with a deck for lounging, private en suite bedrooms and a luxurious dining saloon, you can also look forward to buffet breakfasts, three-course lunches, daily swimming stops and trips to local nature parks.

WORDS: LILY SMITH. IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Experience the highs of Sicily

WHAT: The Mountains of Sicily with Cefalù
WHERE: Sicily
WHEN: 22 August–31 October 2023
PRICE: From £1,355 per person based on two sharing for 10 nights
VISIT: inntravel.co.uk

This self-guided hotel-to-hotel walking holiday reveals two very different sides to Sicily: the uplands of the Madonie Natural Park – the authentic face of rural Sicily – and the vibrant coastal town of Cefalù, the star of the second season of HBO's black comedy-drama *The White Lotus*, with its vast rocky massif that looms large over the town. In the mountains, walkers can expect to see golden and Bonelli's eagles, plus a wealth of endemic flora, and views that stretch towards the Aeolian Islands. On the two full days in Cefalù, spend time exploring the town and enjoying the beach, or even take the train to the capital of Palermo. Great walking, unspoiled hill-top towns, characterful hotels, and inspirational views of glowering Mount Etna make for a thrilling Sicilian experience.

Travel through time in Greece

WHAT: Kythnos Walking Holiday
WHERE: Kythnos in the western Cyclades
WHEN: Until 7 November
PRICE: From £1,195 per person based on two sharing for seven nights
VISIT: sunvil.co.uk

One of the least-known islands of the western Cyclades, Kythnos remains very much under the tourist radar. With a history dating back to prehistoric times, the island boasts hot springs, one of the largest caves in Greece, countless chapels scattered across the landscape, plus ruined castles – and, now, a network of walking paths has been opened to explore it all.

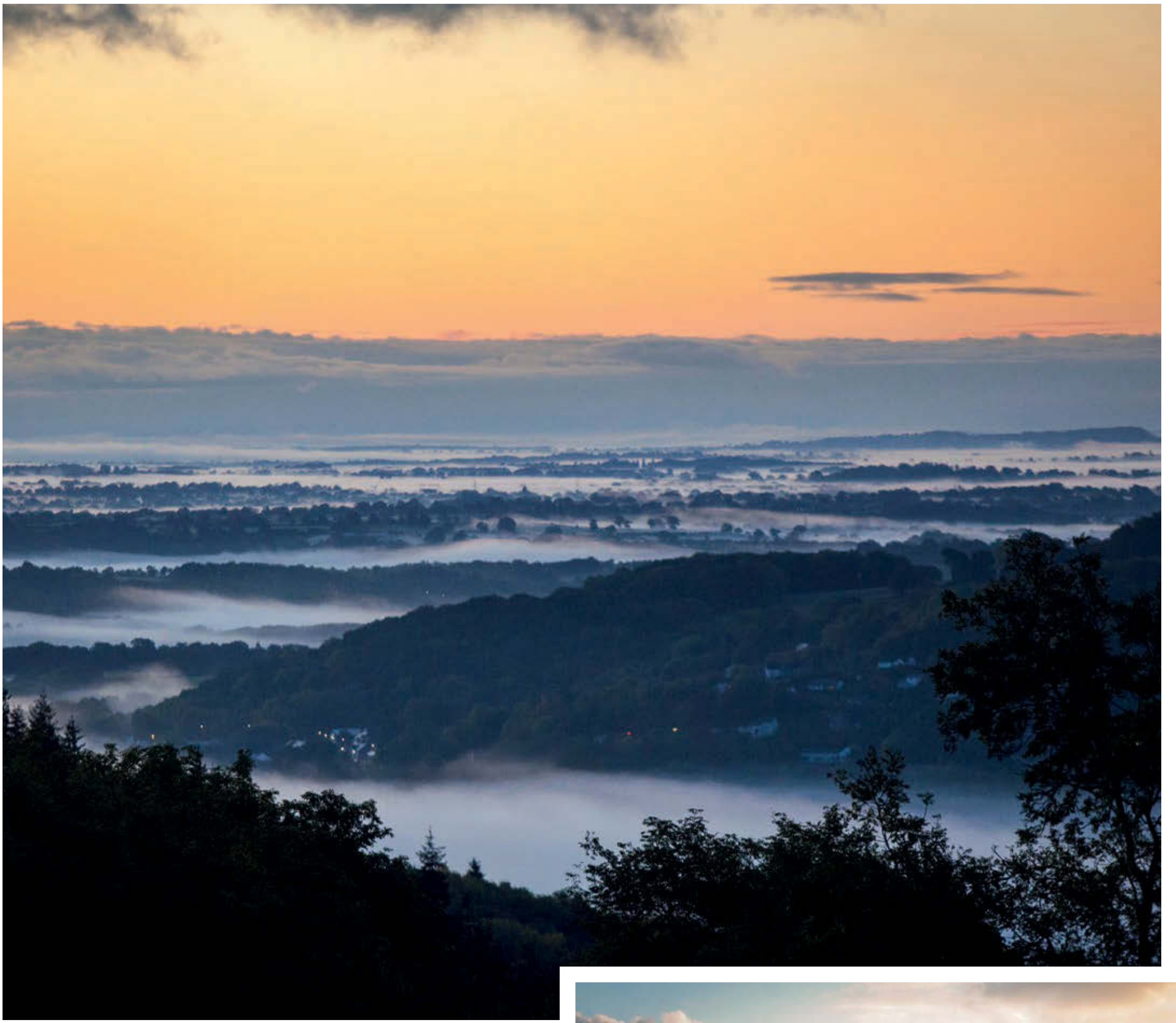
A walking holiday is one of the best ways to really get under the skin of this undiscovered and charming island. Discover exotic fritillaria and orchid flowers in spring, spot migrating birds of prey and herons, and see the protected rare monk seal around the island, if you are lucky. The new one-week hiking tour in Kythnos includes five days' walking from traditional villages, through wild countryside, past historic sites, and taking lunch breaks on Kythnos' many beaches.

Discover the delights of Norfolk

WHAT: North Norfolk
WHERE: Kelling Heath, Norfolk
WHEN: Until end of October
PRICE: From £412 for three nights
VISIT: kellingheath.co.uk

If you want to stay closer to home, Kelling Heath Holiday Park in Norfolk is the perfect base to pick up the coastal trail and meander through pine and conifer forests, across protected heathland, before joining the Norfolk Coast Path, which stretches for 84 miles from Hunstanton to Hopton-on-Sea. You could also take to the Cromer Ridge: a must for nature lovers – walkers are greeted with the heady scent of gorse, and unrivalled coastal views dotted with silhouettes of sea-faring birds. Plus, this route gives walkers a chance to marvel at north Norfolk's iconic steam railway.

The park offers a range of accommodation types, including luxury holiday homes and brand-new woodland lodges, plus it features an on-site health club and its own trim rail, if you're feeling adventurous.



Connect with nature in North Wales

WHAT: Guided Mindful Walking
WHERE: North Wales
WHEN: Available all year round
PRICE: £690 for two people for two nights
VISIT: virginexperiencedays.co.uk

Tucked away in the Ceiriog Valley lies a tiny and tranquil village with a 15th-century inn, where your adventure begins. Invite a loved one to join you and get ready to enjoy a two-night stay in The West Arms, where you'll be able to enjoy delicious locally sourced food and ales.

After a full English breakfast the following morning, you and your fellow walkers will meet up for a guided hill walk through the wild landscape of the Berwyn hills. Your experienced guide will lead you along quiet country lanes, up rambling wooded paths, and across open hillsides, while helping you to reconnect with nature through various mindfulness activities.

Happy gut, happy mind, HAPPY HOLIDAYS

YOUR MIND AND GUT ARE PERFECTLY ENTWINED – AND NEVER MORE SO THAN WHEN ON YOUR TRAVELS. KEEP THEM WORKING IN HARMONY, FOR A CALMER, HAPPIER HOLIDAY

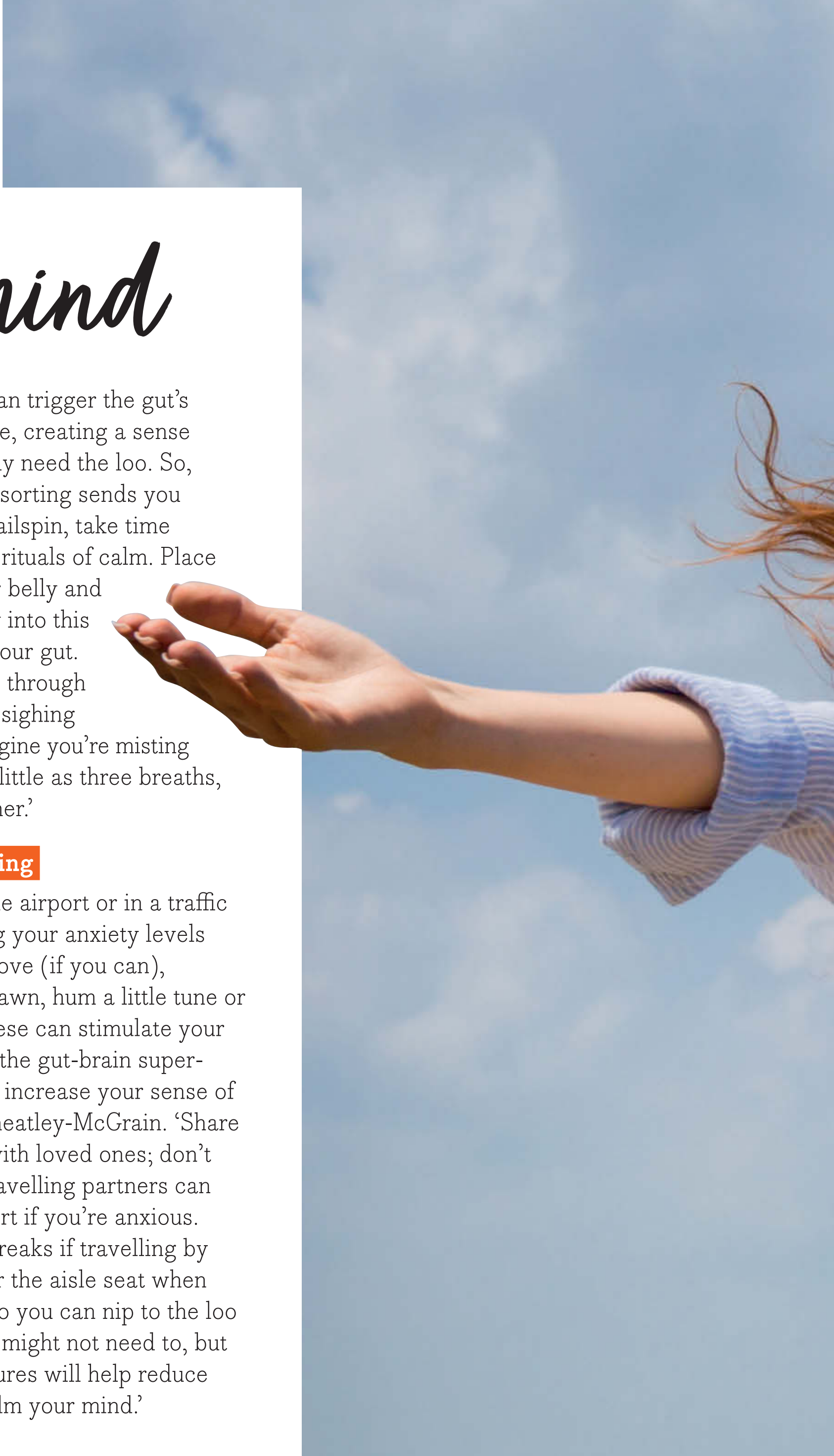
Holidays are officially back, with millions of us jetting off to the sun, and we couldn't be happier! Logging off for two whole weeks, the warmth on your skin and the sweet smell of sun cream. You've browsed the online brochures and picked your dream destination; let the fun commence, right? Well… almost.

As much as we all love holidays, our minds and stomachs don't always play ball. With the stress of packing, planning, and the logistics of transporting you, your travelling companions and possessions by plane, train or automobile, it's no wonder your mind is spinning and your guts are turning before you even reach your destination – and that's before you navigate your fear of flying or nerves at being so far from home.

Here's the thing: your brain and gut are intrinsically linked via what's known as the gut-brain axis. Imagine it like a dual carriageway for information, with your brain and gut continuously sending messages to one another. Neurotransmitters carry signals along a large nerve known as the vagus nerve. This is why, when we're stressed, we can develop gastrointestinal issues, such as wind, stomachaches and cramps, as well as a change in toilet habits.

In order to ensure a happy holiday, we need to take a comprehensive approach to managing travel anxiety and the tummy issues it may cause – and to do this, we have to look at our mind and our gut as a whole. Here, our experts share their top tips for keeping your gut-brain highway in harmonious working order…

WORDS: LARISSA CHAPMAN. IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK



Focus on your mind

Preparation is key

'Sometimes, your biggest source of anxiety comes from worrying about what "might" happen with regards your holiday gut health – which increases the likelihood of it becoming a reality,' says psychologist Dr Megan Arroll. 'One way to alleviate this is to prepare. For example, if you're concerned your tummy might start playing up while you're en route to your destination, pack a "comfort kit", including a bottle of water, wet wipes and scented toilet spray, to help you feel more at ease when you're travelling. Just knowing it's there reduces anxiety, even if it's never used. Similarly, keeping up to date with Government travel advice on trusted websites, and steering clear of triggering tabloid news headlines that spell out doom and gloom, will help keep both your mind and your gut calm, relaxed and under control.'

Visualise positive imagery

'Before and even during your travels, try using mental imagery to calm your mind – and therefore your gut – by projecting yourself at each step of your journey,' adds Dr Arroll. 'If difficulties come to mind, rather than pushing away these thoughts, think of how you can overcome obstacles and visualise yourself doing so. This type of "coping imagery" is incredibly helpful for travel anxiety, as it gives you a roadmap for dealing with events. You can also use gut-directed hypnotherapy, in which you imagine your stomach as wild, fierce and symptomatic before mentally calming its movement – visual representations of the gut as a white-water river or speedway are good ways to achieve this.'

Breathe through it

'We know that our gut and our mind are intimately interlinked, and when we are in a state of stress or anxiety, our body's cortisol, adrenaline and serotonin levels start to rise,' says Cara Wheatley-McGrain, a wellbeing coach. 'High levels of serotonin, in particular, can trigger the gut's peristaltic wave, creating a sense that we urgently need the loo. So, if packing and sorting sends you into a mental tailspin, take time out and create rituals of calm. Place a palm on your belly and breathe deeply into this lower part of your gut. Then, exhaling through the mouth and sighing outwardly, imagine you're misting a mirror. In as little as three breaths, you'll feel calmer.'

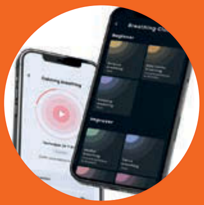
Keep on moving

Still stuck at the airport or in a traffic jam and feeling your anxiety levels rise? 'Try to move (if you can), stretch, sigh, yawn, hum a little tune or sing – all of these can stimulate your vagus nerve – the gut-brain super-highway – and increase your sense of calm,' says Wheatley-McGrain. 'Share how you feel with loved ones; don't bottle it up. Travelling partners can be great support if you're anxious. Take regular breaks if travelling by car, and opt for the aisle seat when on the plane, so you can nip to the loo if needed. You might not need to, but all these measures will help reduce anxiety and calm your mind.'

YOUR TRAVEL CHECKLIST FOR MIND AND GUT

silicolgel
silicolgel

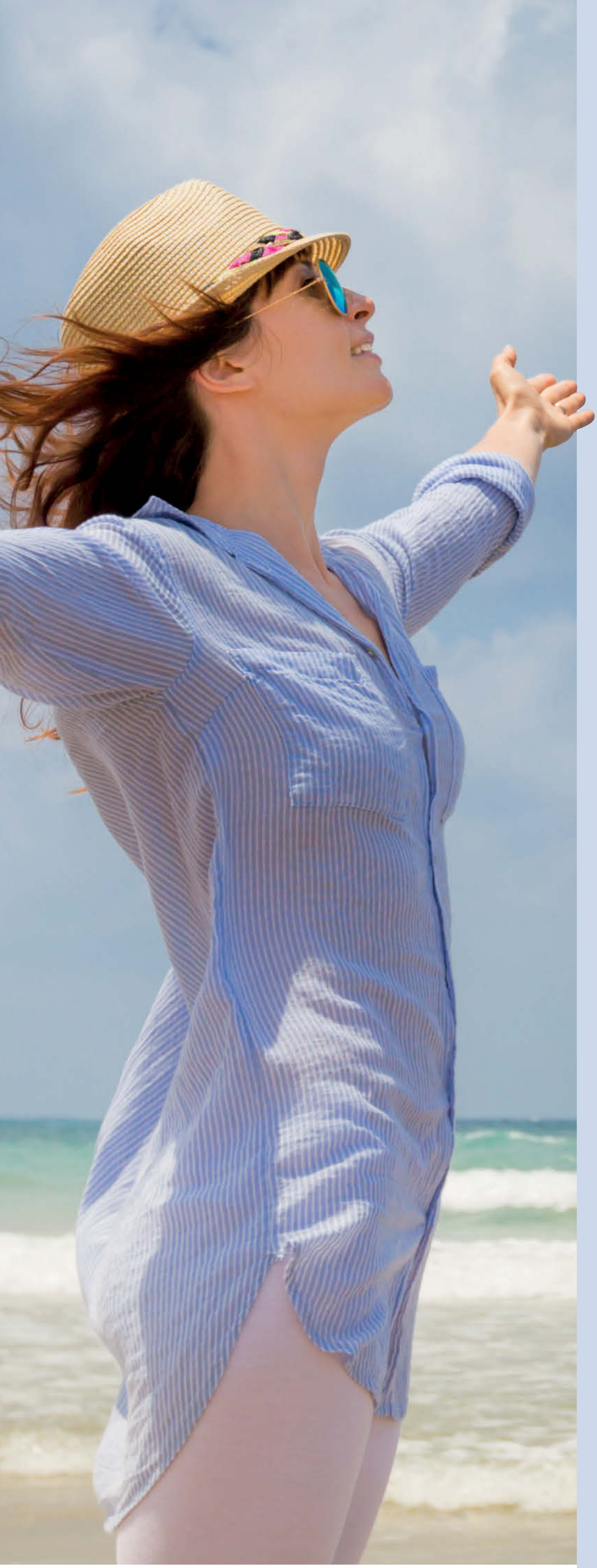
BE PREPARED
Silicolgel comes in travel-sized sachets that can be tucked into hand luggage, and can help alleviate the gastrointestinal discomfort that can result from travel. £10.95, silicol.co.uk



TRY SOME TECH
Relaxation techniques don't come easily when in an acute fight-flight-or-freeze response. Try the Yours app, which has built-in breathing clocks to guide you. yoursapp.com

A.Vogel
Passiflora
Complex Drops

KEEP CALM
Lemon balm and passiflora relieve feelings of anxiety; A.Vogel Passiflora Complex fits perfectly in your pocket, for relaxation on the go. £10.99, avogel.co.uk



Look after your gut

Plan ahead

'There's a line by Buddhist teacher Jon Kabat-Zinn: Wherever you go, there you are. And your bowel habits will follow you too! But there are lots of ways to bolster your gut,' says Wheatley-McGrain. 'On your day of travel, ease up on the coffee, sugary drinks and alcohol, as these can irritate or stimulate the digestive tract. Opt for a light, easy-to-digest meal that you're confident will have a calming impact on your gut – foods such as eggs and sweet potatoes are ideal. Consider giving your gut a little R&R time, too – there's increasing evidence around the health benefits of time-restricted eating. Having a later breakfast and earlier evening meal supports Akkermansia muciniphila – one of your good gut bugs – to maintain the integrity and health of the lining of your gut wall.'

Increase your gut resilience

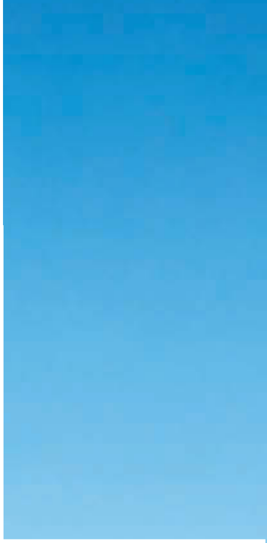
'We know our guts are unique, so investing the time to support a balanced and diverse gut microbiome will increase your gut's resilience over time,' adds Wheatley-McGrain. 'So eat your probiotics if you can – this is a natural way of increasing the diversity of bacteria in your gut. Eating live yoghurt, kefir and kimchi are great approaches to shaping gut diversity in as little as a few weeks. Green bananas need a special mention here, too – not only are they a great source of fibre, but they've also been shown to settle an unhappy tum.'

Embrace routine – and yoga!

'Once you're at your destination things can start to run smoothly,' says Wheatley-McGrain. 'Whether you're sitting on a sun-soaked beach sipping your favourite tipple, or pegging in your tent for some glamping by the banks of a river, you can start to re-establish your circadian rhythm and support your gut and mind health by getting morning sunlight and a good night's sleep. Just like us, our gut bacteria have their own circadian rhythms of activity and rest. If your gut still feels bloated and unhappy, combine simple yoga stretches – reclining twist and knees to chest – with deep breathing. Studies also show a nice long walk can be just as beneficial as many over-the-counter remedies for bloating.'

Try massage

'Jet lag leaving you with that sticky sense of gut lag? Give yourself a gentle gut massage – focus on gently rubbing your belly clockwise to ease constrictions and get your gut moving again if things have slowed down,' says Wheatley-McGrain. 'You could also try a foot massage. Reflex points found in your feet directly connect to your stomach — when these points are stimulated, it will increase blood flow to your stomach, helping to improve digestion. I also recommend taking a small bottle of lavender essential oil in your suitcase to use on these occasions. As an added bonus, it will help you drift off more easily on those hot nights!'



Coasting along

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF SMUGGLERS, OR WALKING THROUGH TIME TO THE AGE OF DINOSAURS, ALEX GREEN REJOICES IN THE ULTIMATE UK COASTAL ADVENTURES

Living on an island, we're drawn to the coast. As we look towards the horizon, we're captivated by the wonders of what lies beyond, while the mysteries of the deep provide endless fascination.

Take a step closer to our shores and you might find yourself on the ultimate coastal adventure. Like a 'choose your own adventure story', it's not entirely clear where the path you pick may lead. The only certainty is that there's always something new to discover in the space where land meets the sea.

It's this mystery and magic of our ever-changing coast that inspires so many great artists and writers. From Turner to Gormley, Murdock to Woolf, they portray a sense of longing for the coast or to merge with the sea, as though returning to the place from which we all came. In *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf writes, 'I am made and remade continually.'

Thanks to the variety of our coastal landscapes and the Great British weather, no two days are ever the same. It is, arguably, one of the best coastlines in the world for dramatic scenery and exhilarating experiences, from fossil-hunting and finding treasures on the beach, to striding out along the clifftops. There's always an adventure to be had, however great or small – you just need to know where to look for it.

In this selection of the ultimate coastal adventures, it's all about taking it slowly – stepping out on foot along some of our best-kept national trails, for a long weekend or a week. Take your time to fully immerse yourself in the landscape and the stories that help bring it to life. Lace up your boots and let's go…

Experience rugged Runswick Bay

Discover wonder and awe along the Cleveland Way

The heritage coast

Picture the past along the Cleveland Way in North Yorkshire, from the traditional fishing ports tucked away in sheltered coves to the gothic castles with views out to sea. While the full length of this national trail follows a horseshoe shape from the moors to the sea, the coastal stretch takes you from Saltburn-by-the-Sea to the rugged cliffs of Filey.

For the ultimate weekend adventure taking in the highlights, begin in Staithes, a cosy harbour town that was once home to a well-known community of impressionist painters. Leaving the colourful fisherman's cottages behind, ascend the cliffs to Runswick Bay as you make your way towards Whitby (18km). Along the way, you'll pass some of best beaches in the country for beachcombing, including Upgang Beach. Time your route at low tide and look out for shells, giant seaweed, ammonites, mermaid's purses, and semi-precious gemstone Whitby Jet.

Whitby is full of seaside charm, with a fascinating history. It's the hometown of explorer Captain Cook, and has literary links to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which famously features the ruins of Whitby Abbey. Enjoy the renowned fish and chips by the pier and a pint of locally brewed beer, Striding the Riding, at one of the olde worlde inns.

Leaving Whitby behind, walk to Robin Hood's Bay (10.5km), once a thriving fishing community and a bolthole for smugglers. A network of hidden passageways leads from the beach to the village, with its quaint fisherman's cottages along narrow, cobbled streets.

DON'T MISS The Captain Cook Memorial Museum is based in the 17th-century house in Whitby where Cook lodged as an apprentice. Hear tales of Cook's historic voyages and seamanship, which gave him the reputation as one of the greatest adventurers that ever lived. cookmuseumwhitby.co.uk

WHERE TO STAY The White Horse and Griffin is a 450-year-old coaching inn that was used as a meeting place for explorers Cook and William Scoresby, who hired and fixed their crews from the building. whitehorseandgriffin.com

Step into smugglers' Britain in Robin Hood's Bay

IMAGES: PAUL KENT, DEPENDABLE PRODUCTIONS, SHUTTERSTOCK

The timeless coast

In this walk through time, millions of years of the earth's history are revealed in the rocks that line the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site. In just 95 miles, from Exmouth, east Devon, to Old Harry Rocks, west Dorset, you can witness three different time periods, including the Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous ages. There is simply nowhere else in the world quite like it.

Along the way, experience precipitous cliffs and one of the closest environments you can get to a rainforest in Britain, through the undercliffs towards Lyme Regis. Quaint seaside towns line the route, some of which will be familiar from famous novels and films – most recently, *Ammonite*, starring Kate Winslet as Mary Anning, who famously made the discovery of a complete ichthyosaur skeleton when she was just 12. This marine reptile dates back 195 million years, to the age of the dinosaurs.

For a weekend's adventure over two days, begin at Lyme Regis, where multi-coloured Georgian houses mingle with the promenade and the Cobb, a long stone harbour wall overlooking the sweeping arc of Lyme Bay. From here, the coast path leads to Charmouth (4.9km) and the Heritage Coast Centre, where you can join a fossil-hunting tour of the local beach and cliffs. If you're lucky, you may find your very own ammonite that you can keep and treasure.

Leaving Charmouth behind, the walk to Seatown (6.5km) picks up part of The Monarch's Way – the escape route taken by Charles II after the battle of Worcester in 1651.

To top it all off, climb to the summit of Golden Cap – the highest point on the south coast at 191 metres (627 feet). On a clear day, you can enjoy awe-inspiring views extending across Lyme Bay to Dartmoor, and ahead to the Isle of Portland. Continue onto the pretty village of Seatown, where The Anchor Inn provides a walkers' welcome, with hearty food served right on the beach.

DON'T MISS The Lyme Regis Museum is located on the site of Mary Anning's house and shop. Here, learn more about the area's natural history, as well as the many writers who have found inspiration in the town. lymeregismuseum.co.uk

WHERE TO STAY The Alexandra is a beautiful boutique hotel, set within private gardens overlooking Lyme Bay and the famous Cobb harbour. hotelalexandra.co.uk

Soak up the views from Golden Cap

IMAGE: ANDREAS BYRNE/SOUTH WEST COAST PATH ASSOCIATION

IMAGES: NORFOLK TRAILS, ANDREW MIDDLETON, NORFOLK COAST PATH NATIONAL TRAIL – EXPERIENCE PROJECT

Famously flat Norfolk is a walkers' paradise

The big-skies coast

The Norfolk Coast Path runs from Hunstanton round to Sea Palling, taking you through low sea cliffs, charming seaside towns, and extensive sandy beaches and dunes.

This is possibly one of the most accessible stretches of coastline in Britain: relatively flat, with new and improved paths at Holme-next-the-Sea, Wells-next-the-Sea, and Holkham, making it suitable for mobility aids and pushchairs in parts. With few ascents and descents, keen walkers can cover longer distances and still take time to enjoy the big, open sky views.

For the ultimate long weekend adventure, follow the coast path from Old Hunstanton to Cromer over three or four days. Between Hunstanton and Thornham, stop off to see the dunes at Holme, before making your way to Brancaster Staithe (18.5km).

From Brancaster to Wells-next-the-Sea (20km), walk through quintessential Norfolk coastal seascapes along boardwalks, with views of salt marshes and sand dunes and the sound of reeds swaying in the breeze. Feel the sand between your toes at Holkham and see the classic English beach huts, with their pinewood backdrop. When you reach Wells, have a go at crabbing on the quayside, or relax in a cosy seaside inn.

Between Wells and Weybourne (26km) you can get closer to the wildlife with a seal-spotting boat trip or birdwatching at the Cley Marshes nature reserve.

From Weybourne to Cromer (12.8km), you experience the highest point on the Norfolk coast, with panoramic views out to sea and over the North Norfolk Railway. When you reach the Victorian seaside town of Cromer with its picturesque pier, visit the Fishermen's Heritage Centre and sample the world-famous Cromer crab.

DON'T MISS While the Norfolk Coast is famous for its big skies by day, its night skies are out of this world, and home to four Dark Sky Discovery Sites. norfolkcoastaonb.org.uk/exploring/dark-sky-discovery-sites

Take a boat trip to spot some seals

Stargaze in one of Norfolk's Dark Sky Discovery Sites

Head for Cromer and sample its famous crab!

Enjoy open-air entertainment at The Minack Theatre

The wild west coast

The far south-west tip of England, from Mount's Bay to St Ives, is one of the wildest, most magical coastal adventures to be had anywhere in the world. On every exposed clifftop, and in every tucked-away hidden cove, there are tales about the saints, sinners, myths and legends that characterise this coastline.

It follows part of the South West Coast Path, the longest route in the family of national trails. It can take around seven to eight weeks to complete the entire route, from Minehead in Somerset to Poole in Dorset, so this makes for the ultimate week-long adventure, taking in just a few of the highlights.

Beginning in Penzance, stride out across the causeway at low tide to St Michael's Mount, following in the footsteps of pilgrims and a legendary giant. Evidence of an ancient forest has been found here, while the legend of the lost lands of Lyonesse speaks of whole towns and villages being submerged by the sea.

As you follow the coast path to Porthcurno (18.5km), you pass the fishing ports of Newlyn and Mousehole, described by Dylan Thomas as 'the loveliest village in Cornwall'. At Porthcurno, The Minack Theatre is cut from the rocky cliffs above the beach. If you time it right, you could enjoy an evening performance at this open-air theatre, with the breaking waves as a backdrop.

From Porthcurno to Cape Cornwall (18.4km), you pass the most westerly point of Britain at Land's End, before reaching the relics of the tin mines dotted along this granite coast – a reminder of the industrial past that forms part of this Cornish Mining World Heritage Site.

Leaving Cape Cornwall behind where the Atlantic currents split, strike out towards Zennor (18km) before the last leg to St Ives (10.4km). Tales of mermaids and their lovers lost at sea can be heard whispering on the waves along this stretch. There's a real feeling of remoteness upon these lonely clifftops; it's just you and the seabirds circling overhead, with the occasional sighting of a seal on the rocky outcrops. Arriving in St Ives after this wild experience, you may see everything in a new light. The town became popular with artists and writers thanks to the luminous quality of its pure air and bright light, reflecting off the turquoise waters and golden sands. Visit Tate St Ives and the Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden to learn more about the painters and potters that made St Ives the place it is today.

DON'T MISS The Leach Pottery in St Ives is the original home and workplace of revered potter Bernard Leach. Guided tours bring the pottery's history to life, with stories about the people and the pottery that play a part in its 100-year history. leachpottery.com

WHERE TO STAY The Godolphin hotel is situated on the beach at Marazion in Mount's Bay, and commands spectacular views of St Michael's Mount and out to sea. thegodolphin.com

IMAGES: PAUL WATTS/VISIT CORNWALL, CHRIS PARKER/SOUTH WEST COAST ASSOCIATION, TERRY DEAN

> "There's a real feeling of remoteness upon these lonely clifftops"

Tap into creativity and culture in St Ives

Catch your breath at captivating Cape Cornwall

GETTING AROUND

There are 16 long-distance walking routes in the family of national trails that criss-cross the country. Each one features amazing scenery and wildlife, plus a variety of shorter routes that cater for every coastal adventurer.

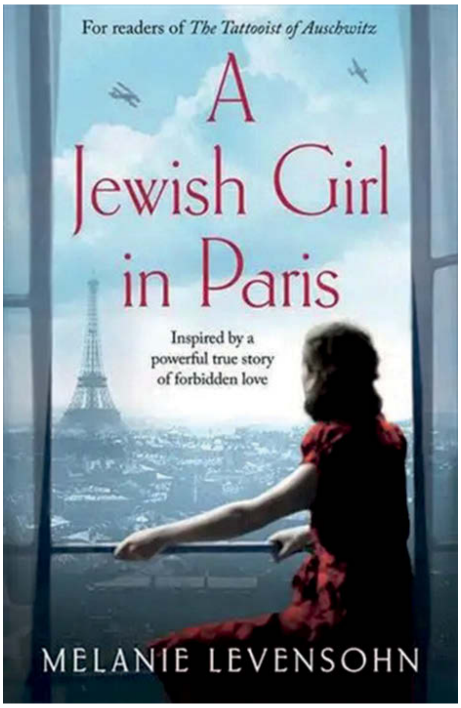
Accessible walks on well-maintained paths are available for those with limited mobility and young families. There's also a new England Coast Path in development, which will become the longest coast path in the world.

For linear walks, it's highly recommended you park at one end and take a bus, train, or taxi ride to the start so you can walk back to your car or accommodation. Each national trail features the acorn symbol on signposts, making it easy to follow.

For the most part, while following the coastal paths, just keep the sea on one side and follow the waymarked route. Always check the website for each trail before setting out, as there are often diversions in place due to the nature of these shifting shores. Take plenty of water, suitable clothing, and a map – you never know when you might need it. Happy walking!

nationaltrail.co.uk

Public Footpath


For readers of The Tattooist of Auschwitz
A Jewish Girl in Paris
Inspired by a powerful true story of forbidden love
MELANIE LEVENSOHN

A Jewish Girl In Paris *by Melanie Levensohn, translation by Jamie Lee Searle (Panmacmillan, £9.99)*

Inspired by true events and set against the backdrop of the Second World War, Melanie Levensohn's powerful novel about forbidden love is an enthralling debut. This story starts in occupied Paris, 1940. A young Jewish girl, Judith, falls in love with the son of a wealthy banker and Nazi sympathiser – his family will never approve. As the Germans impose more and more restrictions on Jewish Parisians, the incredible danger they are in becomes apparent and the horror intensifies. The couple secretly plan to flee the country. But before they can make their escape, Judith vanishes.

Montréal, 1982. Shortly before his death, Lica Grunberg reveals to his daughter, Jacobina, that she has or had an older half-sister, Judith. Lica escaped the Nazis but has no idea what happened to his first-born. Jacobina vows to find the sister she never knew. Her search languishes for years, until she is spurred on by her young friend Béatrice, who, with problems of her own, is looking for a distraction.

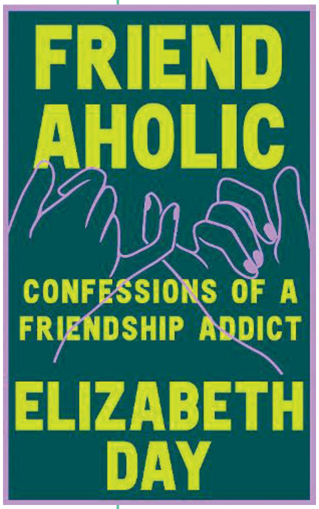
The two women discover a dark family secret, that stretches over two continents and six decades, This beautiful, heart-wrenching novel accurately examines the harsh realities of war whilst remaining hopeful and celebrating resilience and love.

★★★★★

A GREAT READ

BOOK CLUB

THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR SHARES HER PICKS OF THE MONTH, FROM LOST LOVE AND A PROVOCATIVE EXPLORATION OF FRIENDSHIP, TO PAGE-TURNING TALES OF CRIME AND RETRIBUTION

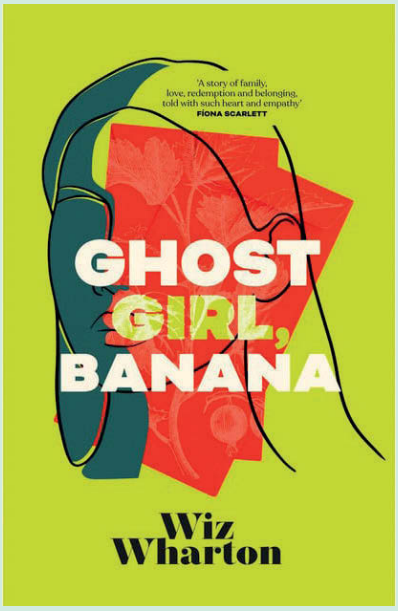

FRIEND AHOLIC
CONFESSIONS OF A FRIENDSHIP ADDICT
ELIZABETH DAY

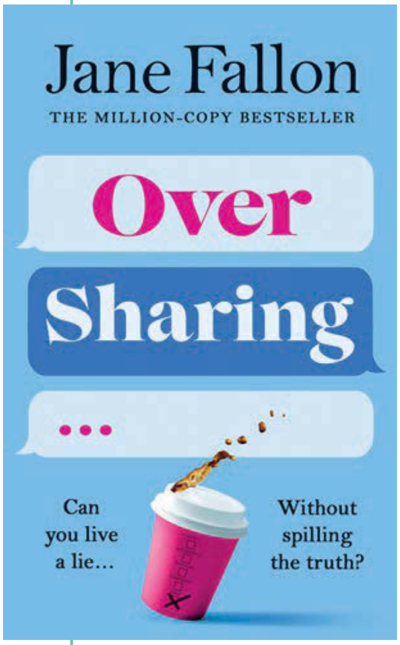
Friendaholic

by Elizabeth Day (HarperCollins, £16.99)

I was totally absorbed by this non-fiction book that celebrates and evaluates the role of friendship. We live in a society that places romantic love very high on the agenda, but if you are lucky, you'll know how vital friendships are. Why don't we talk about that love more? When the global pandemic hit in 2020, Day, like many of us, missed and longed for her friends. It led to an examination of the important role of friends – the joy and love, fury and despair – they generate. From ghosting, and frenemies, to fleeting situational friends and forever-there friends, she leaves no stone unturned. *Friendaholic* is the book to buy for the friends you love, but it's also the book that helps you become a good friend to yourself. Original, honest and thought-provoking.

★★★★½


'A story of family, love, redemption and belonging, told with such heart and empathy'
FIONA SCARLETT
GHOST GIRL, BANANA
Wiz Wharton



Over Sharing

by Jane Fallon (Penguin, £16.99)

Iris and Tom divorced four years ago, but Iris still finds herself comparing the life she is leading with the one she 'should' have had. She longs for the family she wanted with her ex. Then, she becomes aware that Maddy (the woman Tom left her for) is now a successful family influencer with a huge following, posting wholesome videos with her husband and their three-year-old twins. But the husband isn't Tom – he is nowhere in sight. Iris is furious, reasoning that her marriage broke down for a fling. Reeling from the unfairness that Maddy has everything Iris wants, she sets about ruining Maddy's life.

A sympathetic look at the world of influencers. Fallon reminds us that no one is what they seem, but some are better than you hoped.

★★★★☆

PLATINUM EXPERT
Adele Parks MBE

Adele Parks MBE is the author of 22 bestselling novels, including the recent *Sunday Times* and ebook number-one hit *One Last Secret* (Harper Collins, £8.99). Over 4.5 million UK editions of her work have been sold. She is a proud ambassador of the National Literacy Trust and the Reading Agency: two charities that promote literacy in the UK. Follow her on Twitter @adeleparks, and on Instagram @adele_parks

Conviction

by Jack Jordon (Simon & Schuster, £14.99)

TO STEAL A MAN'S FREEDOM ALL IT TAKES IS . . .
CONVICTION
JACK JORDAN
'If you like a legal thriller you'll love this'
HARRIET TYCE

How is it possible that I have not read Jack Jordon before now? I thoroughly enjoyed this tightly plotted, moral-dilemma crime novel, which had me on the edge of my seat. Wade Darling stands accused of killing his wife and children before burning the family home to the ground. Barrister Neve Harper knows defending him could be career-making.

Neve is determined to prove Wade's innocence until a terrifying stranger tells her she must lose this case or Neve's own dreadful secret about her husband's disappearance will be revealed. The stranger makes it clear her loved ones will be killed if she doesn't follow instructions.

Neve faces the most agonising choice – him or us. This tense, smart story is brilliantly written. A true page-turner.

★★★★½

Ghost Girl, Banana

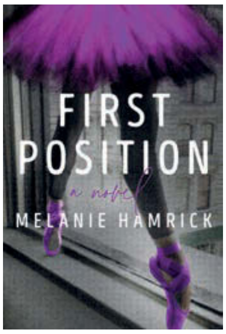
by Wiz Wharton (Hodder & Stoughton, £14.99)

In 1966, Sook-Yin is exiled from Kowloon to London, with orders to restore honour to her family. As she strives to fit into a world that doesn't understand her, she realises that survival will mean carving out a destiny of her own, rather than trying to mould and meld. Thirty years later, her daughter Lily can barely remember the mother she lost as a small child. But when she is unexpectedly named in the will of a powerful Chinese stranger, she goes to Hong Kong to learn about her lost identity and claim the inheritance; she soon learns that the secrecy that shrouds her heritage is dark and deep. Her apparent good fortune comes with a price. A powerful debut about how we all want to belong. Genuine and gorgeously written.

★★★½☆

First Position

by Melanie Hamrick (HarperCollins, £8.99)



This propulsive debut novel about the seductive, cutthroat world of professional ballet charts a dancer's fall from grace, which ignites a dark ambition. Sylvie Carter has broken every rule in her relentless pursuit to get to the top of her profession. However, the ballet world is unforgiving, and when a shattering scandal erupts, Sylvie alone is blamed, losing everything she has ever worked for. She vows never to make the same mistake again and, yet, the tagline warns 'dancing is her obsession, desire is her undoing'. This glamorous novel takes us to New York, Vienna and Paris as Sylvie faces a professional and personal challenge when she embarks on an intense and passionate relationship that could be the making of her… or could cost her everything. An exciting debut.

★★★½☆

STAYING IN GOING OUT

YOUR WHAT'S-ON GUIDE

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR DOWNTIME WITH OUR GUIDE TO THE BEST ENTERTAINMENT FOR THE MONTHS AHEAD

Live experiences

THEAKSTON OLD PECULIER CRIME WRITING FESTIVAL

HARROGATE

Crime writing can sometimes feel a little overlooked by the literary scene – but not here! Visit Agatha Christie's old haunt, The Old Swan hotel, to hear from some of the best in the business, including stellar names such as Vaseem Khan, Val McDermid, Lee Child, Lisa Jewell, Ruth Ware and Lucy Worsley.

IN GOOD COMPANY: NICOLE FARHI + LUCILLE LEWIN

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Celebrated designers turned sculptors Lucille Lewin and Nicole Farhi have joined together to create In Good Company, a celebration of creativity and friendship. The hugely successful pair had, unbeknown to each other, left their stellar fashion careers to have new, equally successful, careers as sculptors. Discover more at the Harley Foundation, Welbeck, Worksop, Nottinghamshire.

IMAGES: IONA WOOLF

On the screen

MATTHEW BOURNE'S SLEEPING BEAUTY

FROM 28 JUNE

If you enjoy the trend of showing theatre at the cinema, you'll love this award-winning production, which is hitting the screens as part of its 10th anniversary celebrations. Enter a world of fairies and vampires, where the traditional narrative is flipped to create a supernatural love story.

ASTEROID CITY

FROM 23 JUNE

Scarlett Johansson leads an all-star cast including Tom Hanks, Margot Robbie, Jason Schwartzman and Tilda Swinton to name but a few, in this Wes Anderson sci-fi rom-com drama set at a 1950s junior stargazer convention, which is disrupted by world-changing events.

On-the-go listening

TAYLOR SWIFT, SPEAK NOW (TAYLOR'S VERSION)

ALBUM, 7 JULY

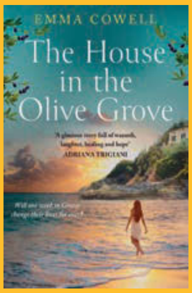
Swift's re-recording of her groundbreaking 2010 album – following the success of her previous two re-recordings – is sure to hit a chord (and get you dancing). She says: 'I love this album because it tells a tale of growing up, flailing, flying and crashing… and living to speak about it.'

THE LOUIS THEROUX PODCAST

SPOTIFY

We're still waiting for the second series of his successful interview show, talking to big names of entertainment on TV, but in the meantime we can enjoy listening to the 53-year-old documentary maker grill his guests via podcast instead, where he will sit down for chats with some of the industry's biggest names.

Great reads



THE HOUSE IN THE OLIVE GROVE

EMMA COWELL (£8.99, HarperCollins). A chef, food writer and jeweller spend a life-changing week in a Greek hideaway in this escapist tale.

TASHA SYLVA
The GUEST ROOM

THE GUEST ROOM

TASHA SYLVA (£14.99, Welbeck). When a bereaved woman rents out her late sister's room, she finds distraction – and secrets – in her guests' possessions.

ALL ABOUT EVIE
MATSON TAYLOR

ALL ABOUT EVIE

MATSON TAYLOR (Simon & Schuster, £14.99). Evie Epworth returns, ten years older, for another witty coming-of-age adventure, this time in 1970s London.

puzzles

SOLUTIONS ON PAGE 128

FROM 10-MINUTE TEASERS TO MORE COMPLEX WORD WORKOUTS, PLATINUM PUZZLES ARE THE ULTIMATE RELAXATION

CODEWORD

■	13	■	20	■	2	■	7	■	7	■	19	■
13	1	15	14	11	5	■	1	4	11	21	14	25
■	18	■	11	■	10	■	11	■	5	■	11	■
25	23	1	5	■	24	23	12	14	25	10	14	2
■	25	■	■	■	13	■	7	■	7	■	2	■
26	23	1	18	19	23	4	6	10	6	8	■	■
■	13	■	23	■	■	■	■	■	7	■	10	■
■	■	7	24	16	14	7	2 S	7 I	18 T	7	9	23
■	23	■	23	■	24	■	7	■	■	■	23	■
10	3	17	11	10	4	10	24	■	1	14	4	1
■	6	■	23	■	14	■	21	■	3	■	22	■
9	23	4	24	1	25	■	14	24	7	16	14	23
■	25	■	18	■	17	■	25	■	2	■	23	■

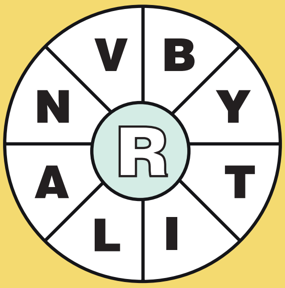
A B C D E F G H ~~I~~ J K L M N O P Q R ~~S~~ ~~T~~ U V W X Y Z

1	2 S	3	4	5	6	7 I	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18 T	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

Each letter of the alphabet has been replaced by the same number throughout this grid. Use the decoded letters given to work out the identity of other letters and fill in the grid. The alphabet list and reference grid will help you to keep track of the letters you've decoded.

WORDWHEEL

You have ten minutes to find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each word must be three letters or more and contain the central letter. Use each letter once, and no plurals, foreign words or proper nouns are allowed. There is at least one nine-letter word.



AVERAGE: 19 words
GOOD: 26 words
EXCELLENT: 32 words

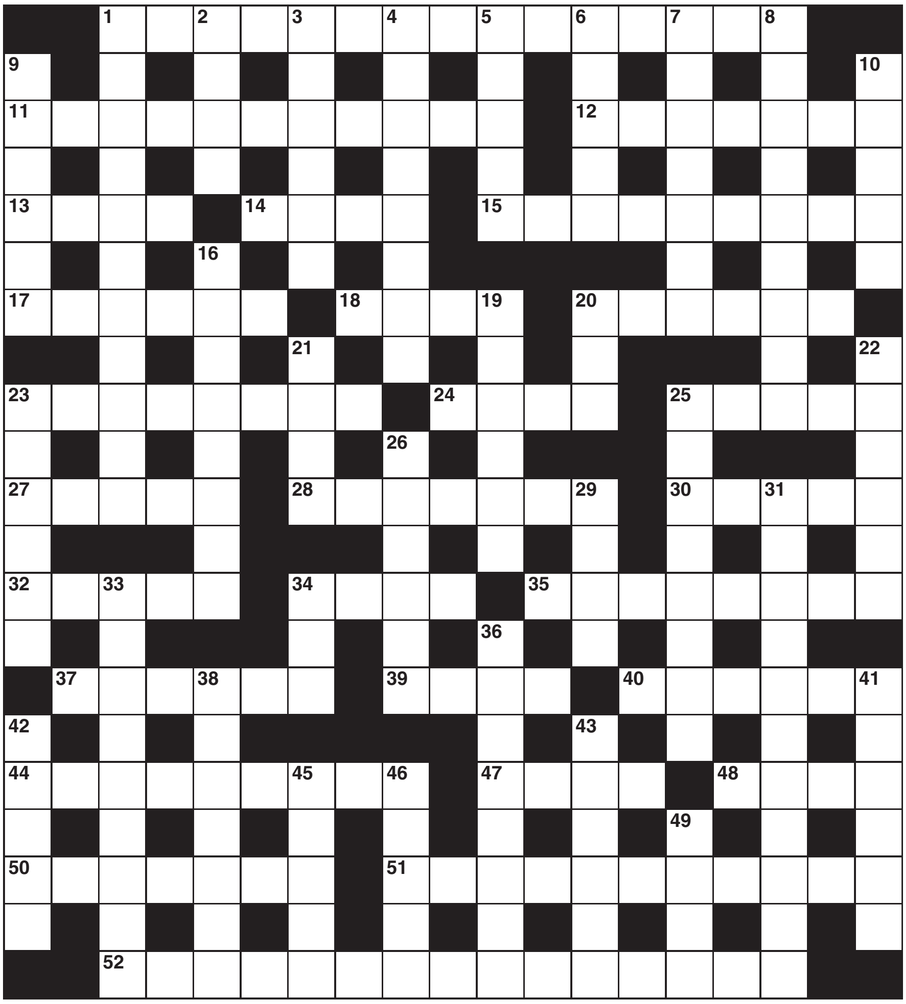
CELL BLOCK

5						2
		3			2	2
		3		4		
			4			
		3				
6			2	6		
	4				3	

	5					
3				2	10	
				10		
			4			
2	3				4	2
		4				

Fill the grid by drawing blocks along the gridlines. Each block must contain the number of squares indicated by the digit inside it. Each block must contain only one digit.

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- **1** Obvious but amusing mistake (9,6)
- **11** Free from prejudice (11)
- **12** Increase, make larger (7)
- **13** Coloured (hair) (4)
- **14** Children's toy for bouncing (4)
- **15** Enervation (9)
- **17** Australian animal (6)
- **18** Frizzy hairdo (4)
- **20** Alternate (3-3)
- **23** Lightest of all the elements (8)
- **24** Utter sharply (4)
- **25** Strain, type (5)
- **27** Light modelling wood (5)
- **28** Spotted feline (7)
- **30** Take place again (5)
- **32** Fidgety (5)
- **34** Trees bearing acorns (4)
- **35** Feigned, pretended (8)
- **37** Fearful (6)
- **39** Highest point (4)
- **40** White or cream vegetable often mashed with carrots (6)
- **44** Phone-in wireless broadcast (4,5)
- **47** Aid illegally (4)
- **48** Sidle (4)
- **50** Tapering flag (7)
- **51** Rude dismissal (5,6)
- **52** Able to control your own feelings (4-11)

DOWN

- **1** Runner-up's prize (6,5)
- **2** Immense (4)
- **3** Preference, choice (6)
- **4** Stoop (4,4)
- **5** Austrian mountain call (5)
- **6** Off-white gemstones (5)
- **7** Blaze from wood (3,4)
- **8** Train in order to change behaviour (2-7)
- **9** Area of grassland (6)
- **10** Affectionate name for a trusty horse (5)
- **16** Tropical American hardwood (8)
- **19** Psychological (6)
- **20** Gift as a bribe (3)
- **21** Marine animal with whiskers (4)
- **22** Revered (6)
- **23** Plant or animal of mixed origin (6)
- **25** Grill over an open fire (8)
- **26** Secure small garage or storeroom (4-2)
- **29** Resist boldly (4)
- **31** Irrefutable (3,3,5)
- **33** Decorative fasteners for shirt sleeves (9)
- **34** *The ____ Man and the Sea*, Hemingway novella (3)
- **36** ____ cheese, pasta dish (8)
- **38** Letters for overseas (7)
- **41** Abundance (6)
- **42** *The Thirty-Nine ____*, novel by John Buchan (5)
- **43** ____ floss, teeth-cleaning string (6)
- **45** Outmoded (5)
- **46** Fertile patch in a desert (5)
- **49** Narrow (4)

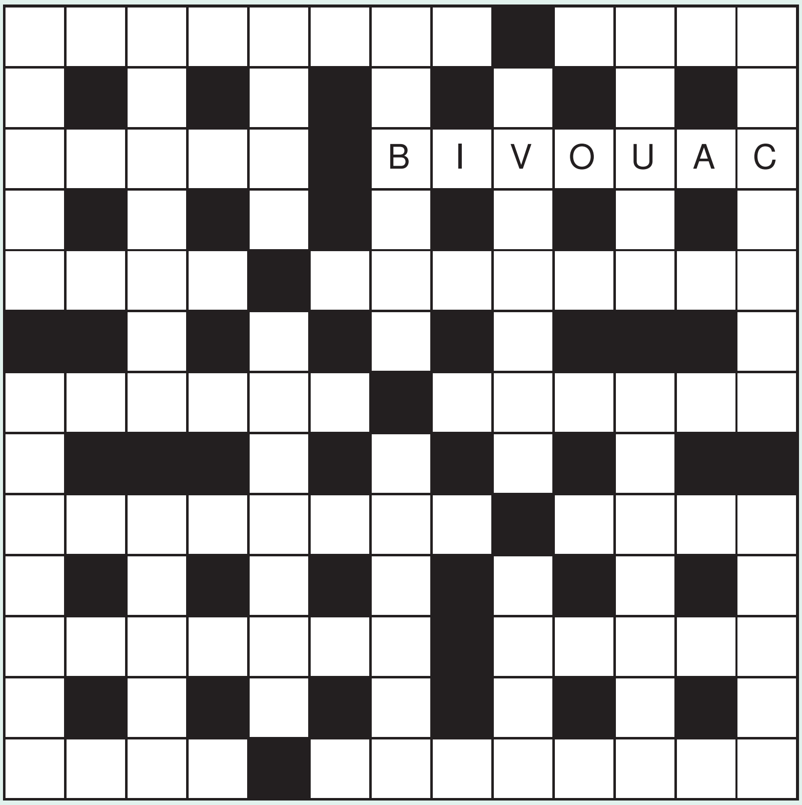
SUDOKU

Fill in the blank squares with the numbers 1 to 9, so that each row, each column and each 3x3 block contains all the numbers from 1 to 9.

4			1		8			7
	5	9	4		3	2	1	
2	1						7	3
		8				1		
5								9
	9			4			5	
	8	6		5		7	4	
3								8

SOLUTIONS ON PAGE 128

FITWORD



4 letters
DENY
ESPY
HELM
PLIE
SPAR
SWAN

5 letters
DROOP
NYLON
ORIEL
PLUMP
WREAK
YOKEL

6 letters
BOUNCY
COBWEB
INFECT
WRITER

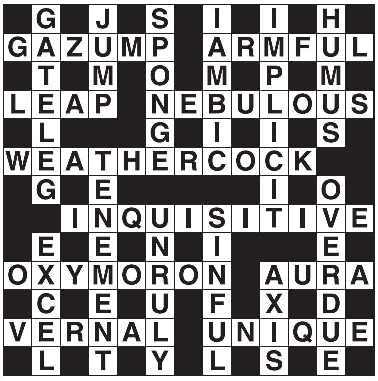
7 letters
BAILIFF
~~BIVOUAC~~
INVALID
LILIBET
NASCENT
OVATION
RICKETY
SCRUBBY

8 letters
CENTUPLE
DABCHICK
PRENATAL
VANGUARD

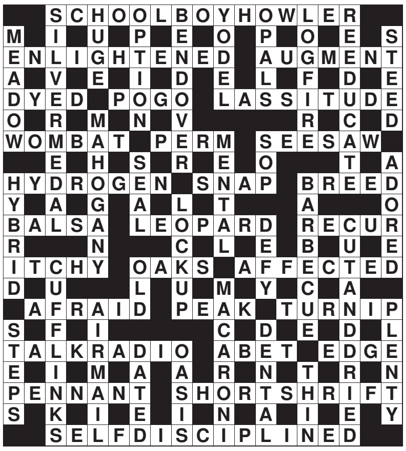
How long will it take you to correctly fit these words into the grid?

SOLUTIONS

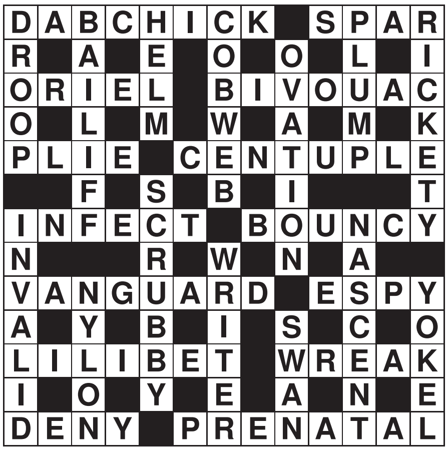
CODEWORD



CROSSWORD



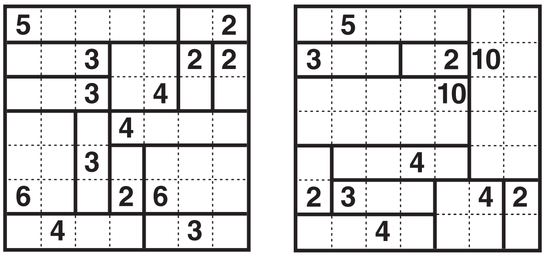
FITWORD



SUDOKU

4	2	3	1	6	8	5	9	7
6	7	1	5	9	2	8	3	4
8	5	9	4	7	3	2	1	6
2	1	4	9	8	5	6	7	3
9	6	8	7	3	4	1	2	5
5	3	7	6	2	1	4	8	9
7	9	2	8	4	6	3	5	1
1	8	6	3	5	9	7	4	2
3	4	5	2	1	7	9	6	8

CELL BLOCK



WORDWHEEL

The nine-letter word is VIBRANTLY.

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Sara Cox

'Writing a novel has always been a bit of an ambition of mine, but like a wallflower at a school disco, I was kind of waiting to be asked on to the dance floor. It's such a special thing to be asked to do, so I wanted to have a good crack at it.

'I think the book is perfect for on the beach and just to have fun with. There are a few emotional parts and a bit of struggle in there but, overall, I wanted to make people laugh, because that's sort of what I do on the radio.

'Let's not mess about, teatime on Radio 2 is the dream. My biggest ambition was to get a daytime show on Radio 2 and so everything else around it is just an added extra bit of fabulousness. It does feel like I'm in a really golden era of my career. I'm blessed at the moment with a great balance. It's been a really, really brilliant few years career-wise.

'There were years where you could not get me arrested. My agent was amazing because, unless you put yourself in front of them, people do forget that you're there. So she'd take me for a coffee and a biscuit with some commissioner, like she was trying to auction me off. I was trying to advertise myself and it was toe-curling. But she was right to do that. I was always working, but I was just doing weekends and I wanted to do more. That sort of experience teaches you a bit of humility and not to take anything for granted. You come back a nicer person because you're grateful when work starts to go well again. If you're lucky enough to do a job you love, it does you good to have a little bit of a reminder that, actually, you're really fortunate. So I don't think I'd really change anything, because of the way it's all panned out. Plus, my career dips coincided with my children being young, so that meant that I was about a lot for my kids.

'I do tend to overthink. My biggest fear is that I'll be seen as a show-off and then that's also mixed in with a little bit of "stay-in-your-lane" ism. I still remember a negative review for *The Girlie Show*, by [journalist] Kate Spicer, who said we did for feminism what Fred West did for Neighbourhood Watch. I mean, it's quite a funny line, but also pretty cruel!

'It's worse for young women now, having to contend with social media – everybody is a critic. Really, the biggest thing we had to face was, heaven forbid, daring to have a slight dimple on your thigh and ending up with it circled in *Heat* magazine. Social media is like the Wild West. I just hope that younger women in the media have the tools to handle it.

'Without wanting to sound like a boxer, I'm still hungry for it. I'm still learning, I still find it exciting and occasionally nerve-wracking, and I still have that fire in my belly.'

Thrown *by Sara Cox (Hodder & Stoughton, £8.99) is out now*

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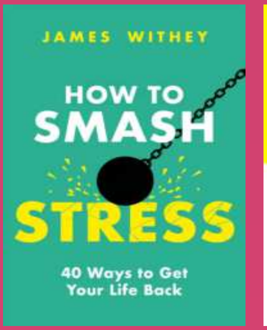
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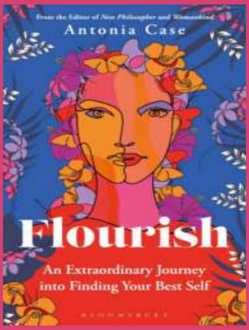
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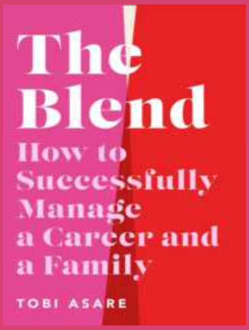
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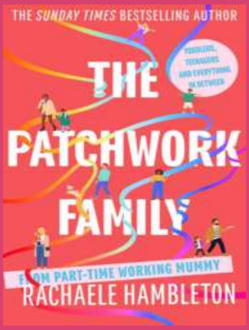
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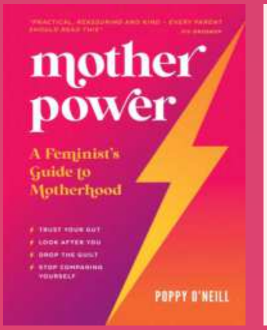
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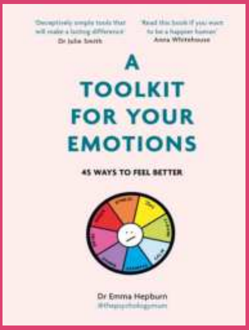
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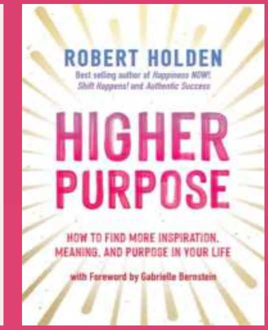
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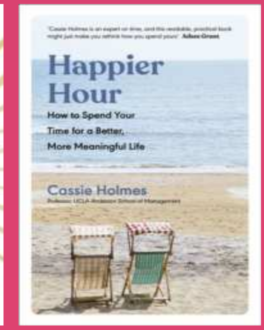
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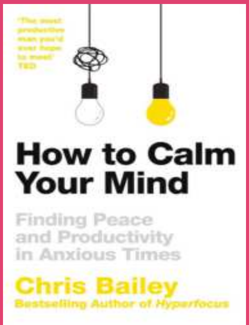
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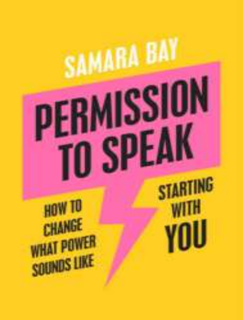
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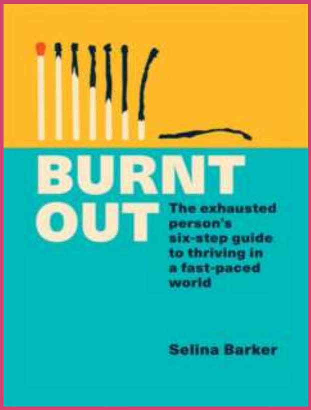
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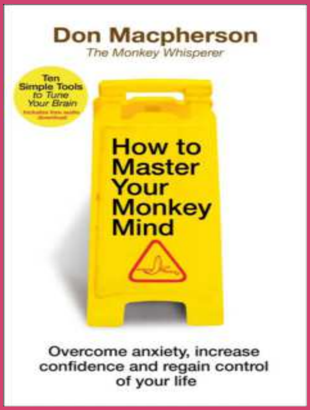
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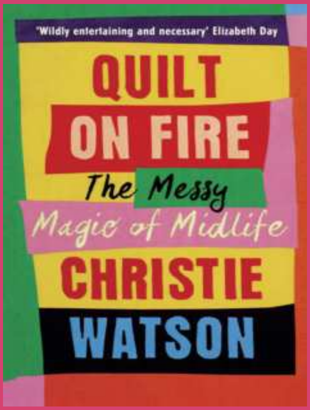
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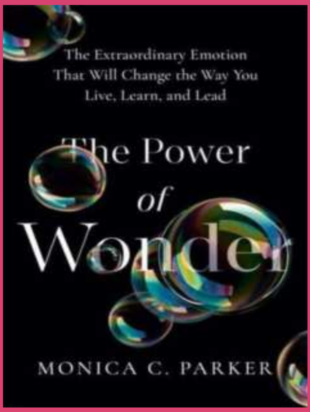
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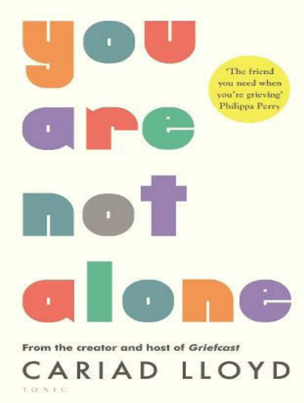
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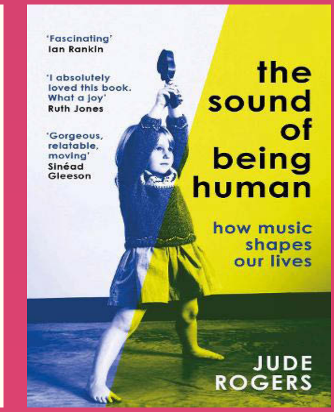
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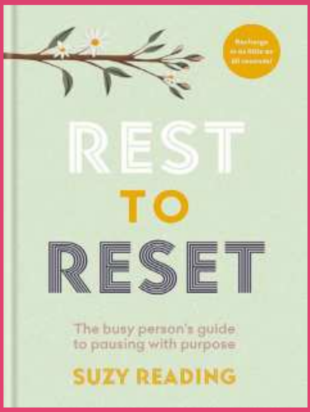
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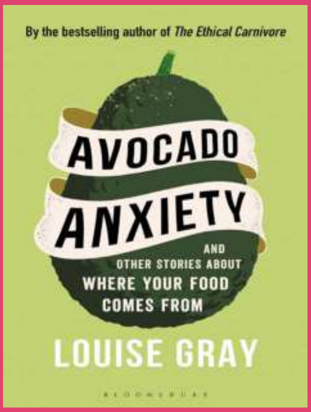
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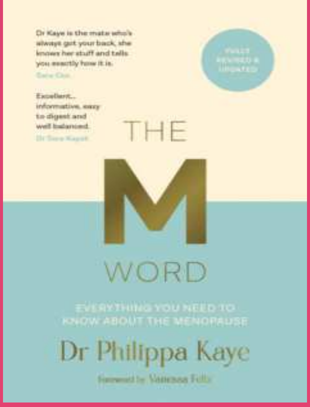
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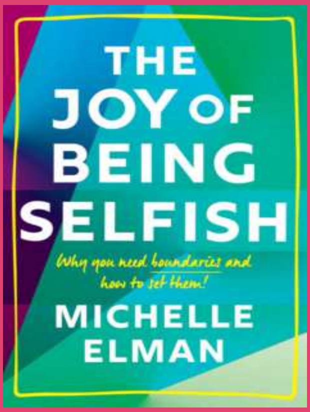
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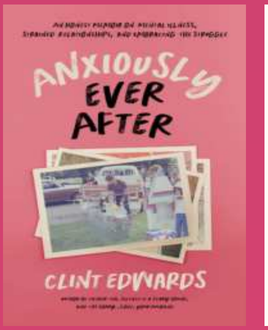
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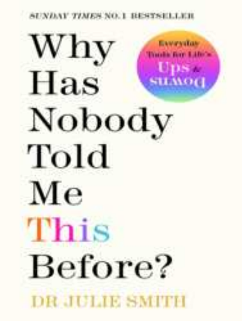
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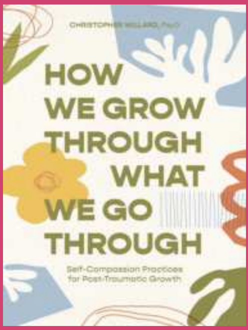
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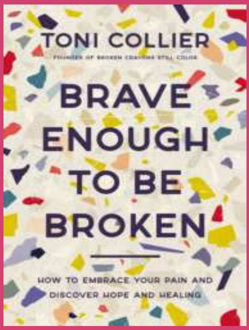
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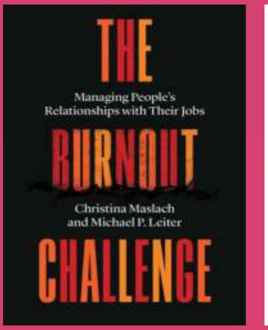
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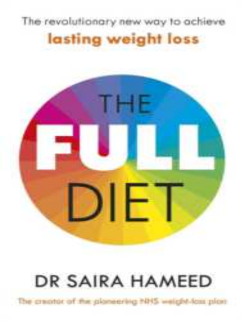
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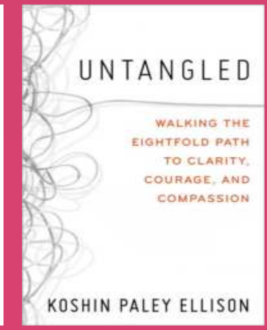
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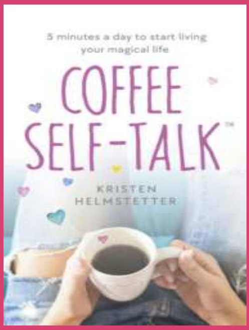
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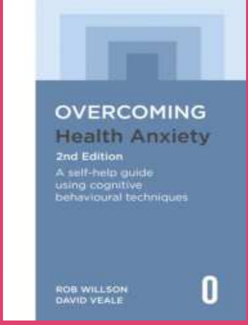
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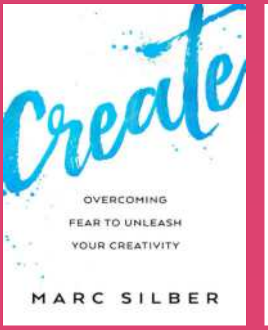
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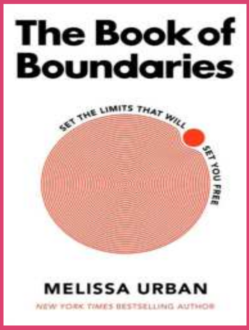
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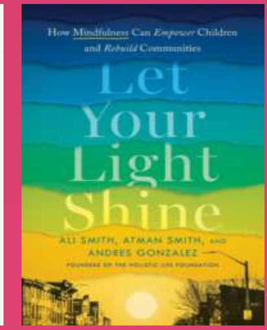
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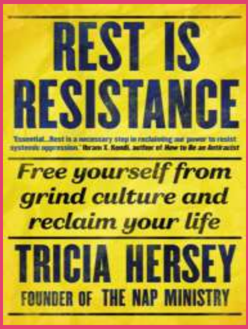
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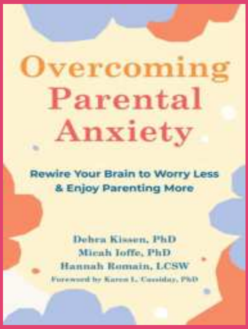
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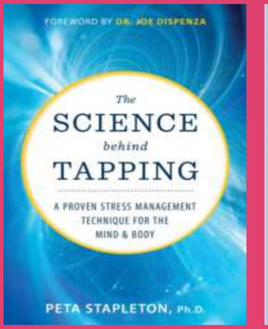
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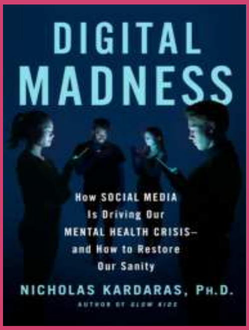
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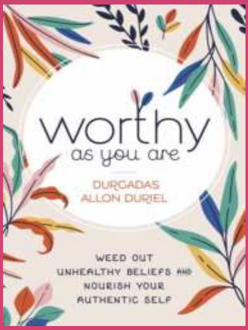
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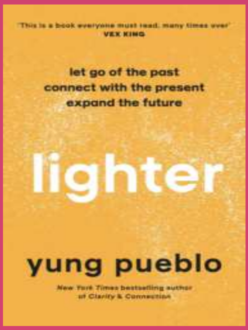
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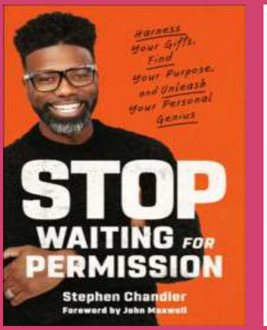
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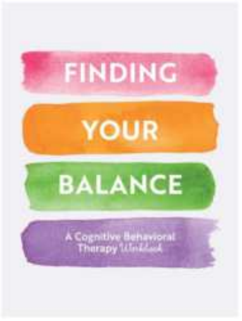
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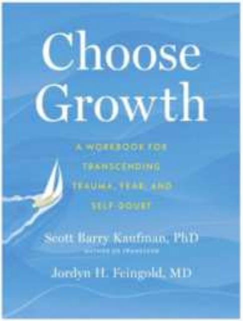
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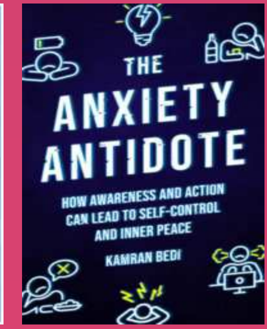
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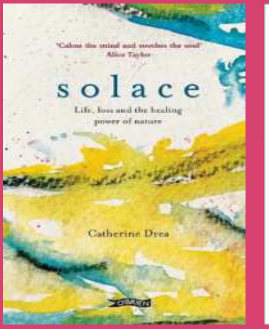
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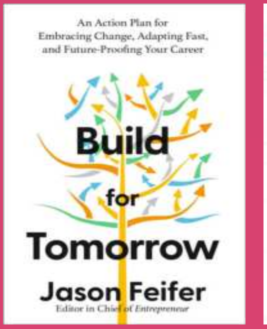
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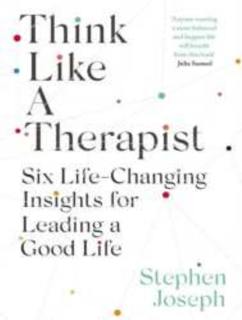
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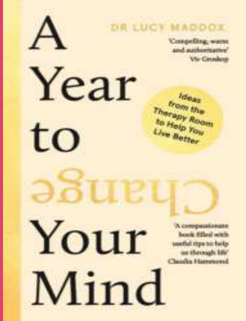
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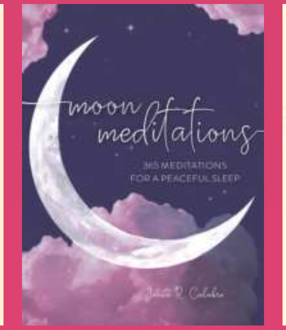
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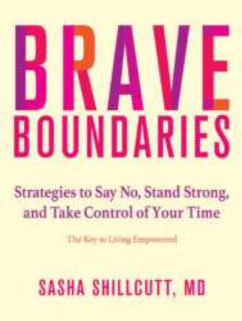
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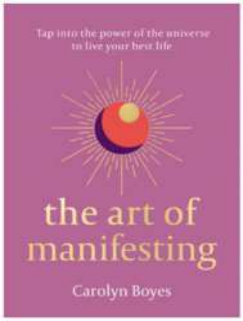
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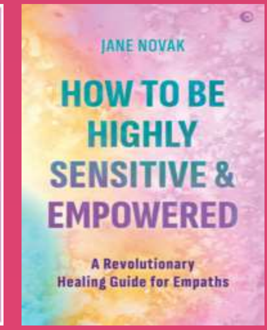
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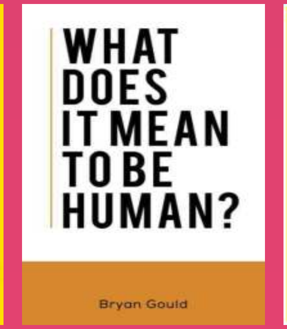
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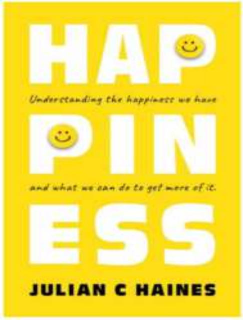
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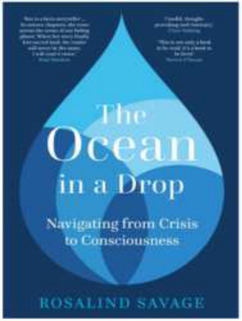
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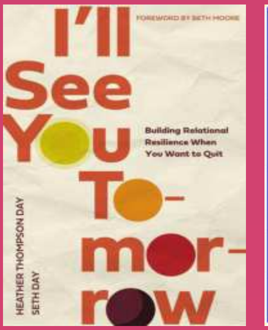
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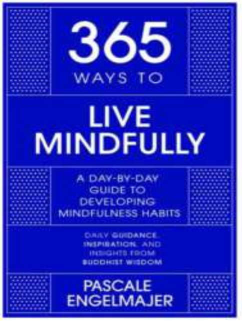
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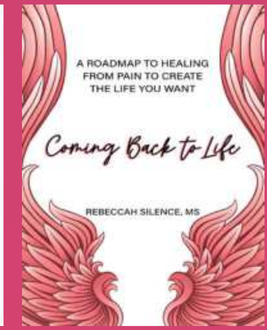
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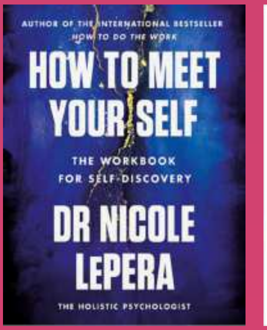
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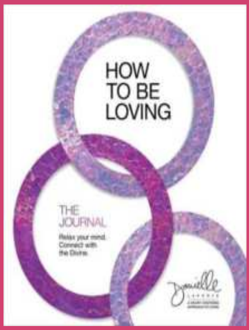
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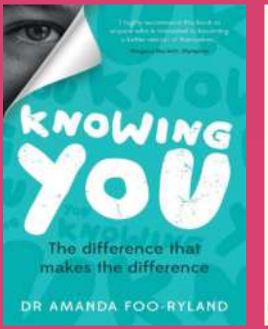
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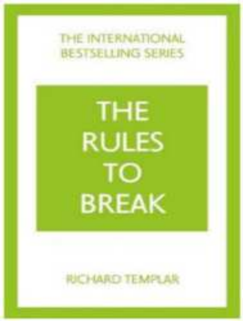
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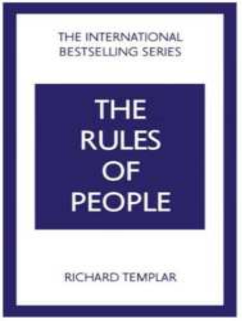
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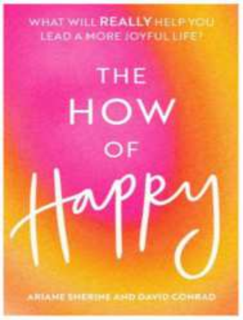
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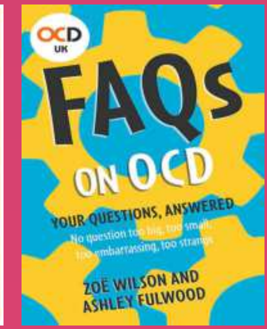
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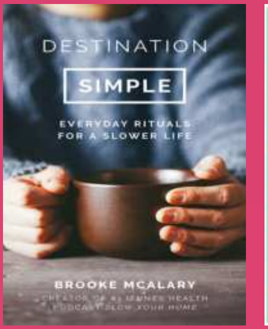
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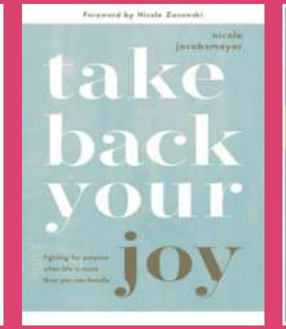
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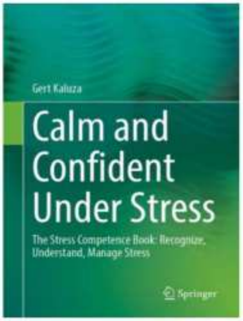
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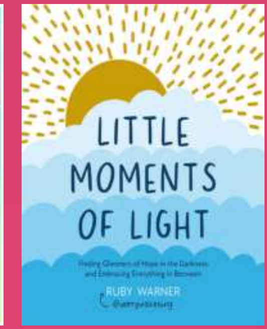
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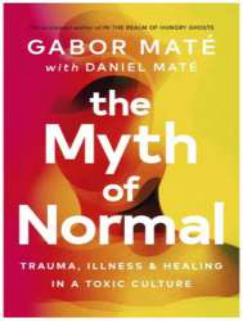
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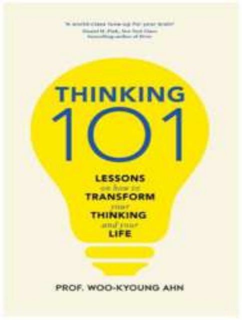
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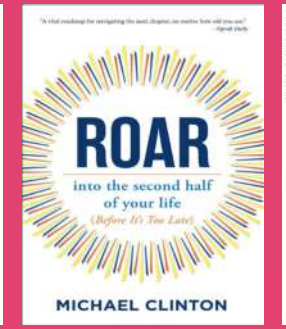
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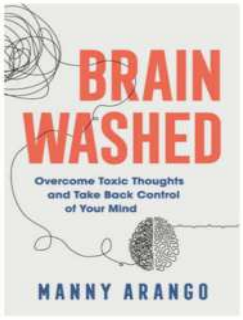
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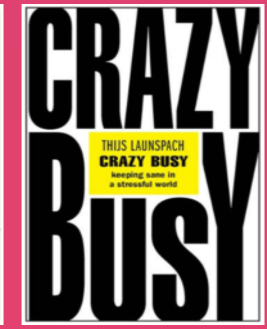
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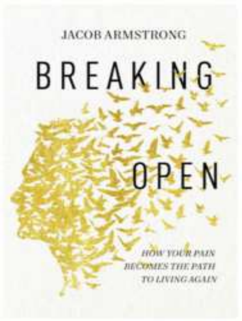
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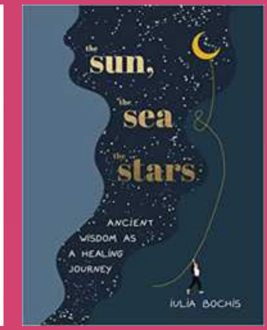
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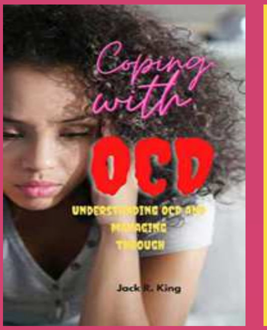
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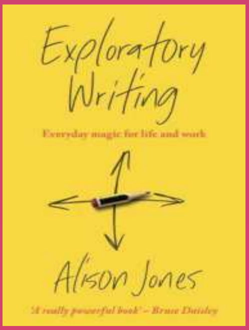
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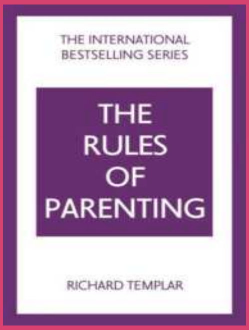
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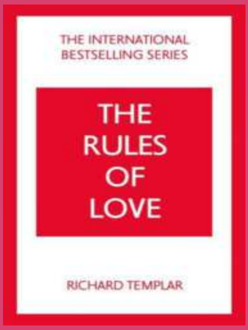
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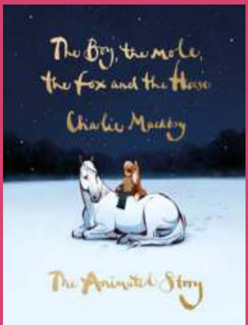
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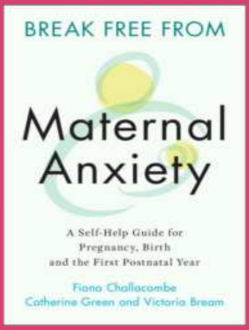
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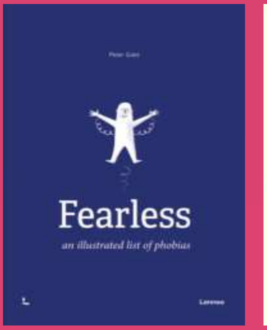
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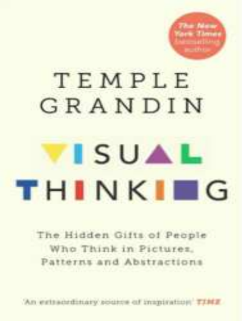
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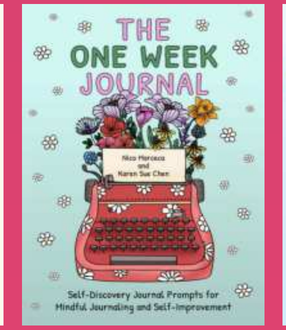
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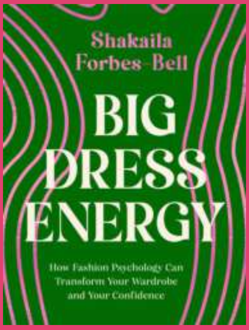
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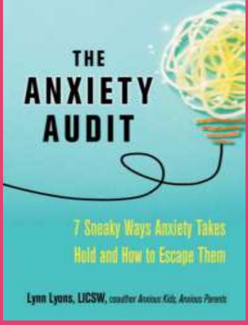
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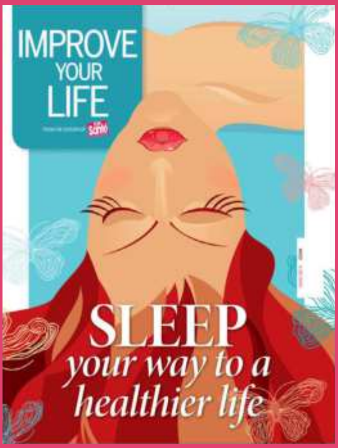
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